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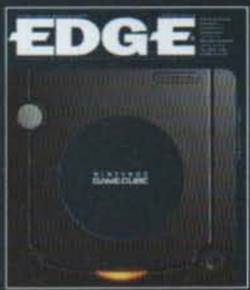
EDGE®

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Nintendo GameCub
The Verdict
Spaceworld 2001
Japanese launch
Luigi's Mansion
Wave Race: Blue Sto
Super Monkey Ball
Plus: Pikmin, Zelda
and Mario Sunshine







By now, you'll all have seen the images of GameCube *Zelda*, and discussed its merits (or lack thereof). Certainly when the first blurry images of Link resolved themselves, eyebrows in the **Edge** office (among those unlucky correspondents not actually attending the event itself) were duly raised. Had Miyamoto-san, after years of intense game-related concentration, finally taken leave of his senses?

Then several more images turned up, and things looked promising. Clearly, Shigeru had decided the super-realistic imagery of the E3 demo reel was an aesthetic and creative cul de sac and performed a *Yoshi's Island/Paper Mario* stylistic volte face. Fair enough.

And then (despite Miyamoto's protestations) the first movies filtered their way into the office, and all became stunningly clear. This GameCube iteration of the *Zelda* franchise is no cel-shaded graphical whimsy; no ordinary videogame with cartoon trappings. This looks like the real thing: a cross between some bizarre Warner Bros outing and early animé – possibly with a hint of dark, '50s Hungarian animation thrown in for good measure. Creatures move with unbridled energy, limbs extend and jaws drop in true Looney Toons fashion.

In the same way that Disney has experimented with various styles for the likes of 'Hercules' and 'The Emperor's New Groove', so Miyamoto has decided to stretch his creative muscles. Naturally, some gamers will be deeply upset by this turn of events, and understandably so: if you've had your dreams of a hi-res, curved-surface, exotically detailed *Zelda* game crushed, then you've every right to be downhearted. And if you're deeply frustrated, there's even an online petition for a 'mature *Zelda*' you can sign (albeit an utterly futile exercise).

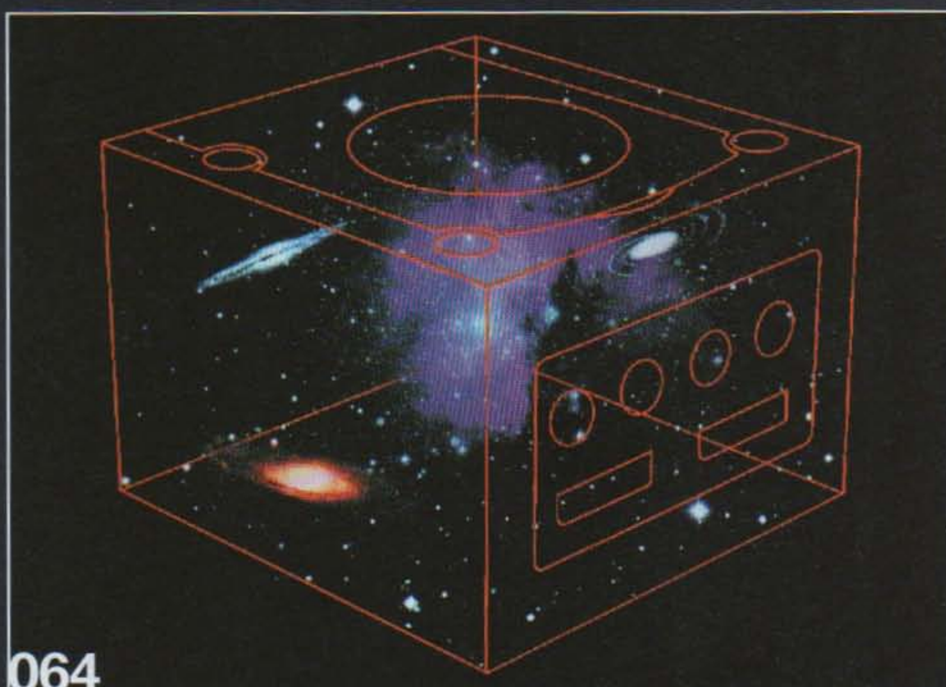
But Nintendo makes no promises, and this new iteration shows much more invention than would a straight evolution of the species. Indeed, with many of Nintendo's recent titles, the company has been driving out in various visual directions, from the pseudorealistic *Luigi's Mansion* to the minimalist angularity of *Dobutso Bancho*, aka *Animal Leader*.

While other developers hurtle towards ever-grungier levels of photorealism in their work, Nintendo seems quite happy to extend the artform tangentially into completely new areas, a move which **Edge** wholeheartedly applauds.

Features







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"It can't be bargained with. It can't be reasoned with. It doesn't feel pity, or remorse, or fear. And it absolutely will not stop, ever, until you are dead"











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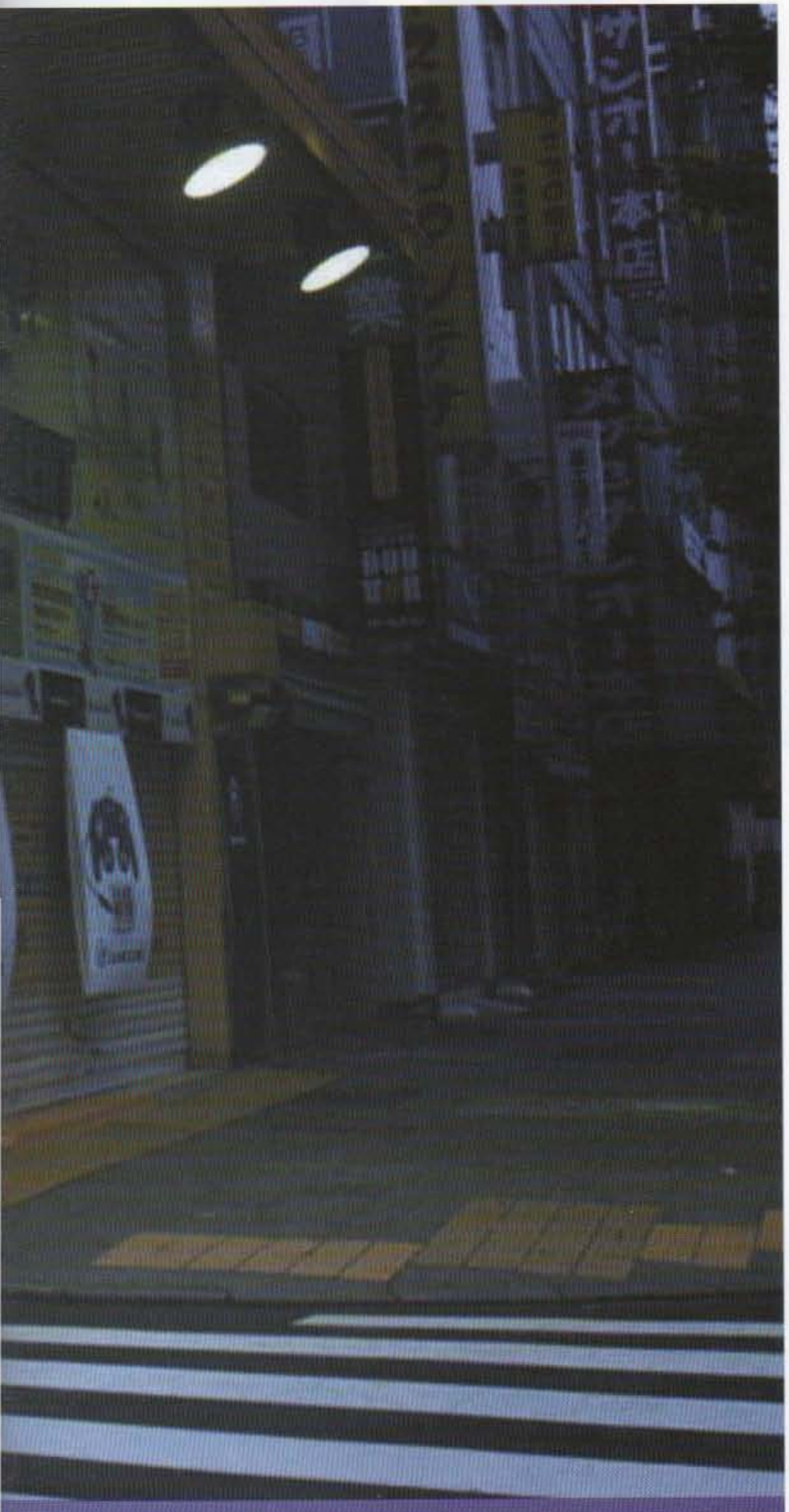
Testscreen

News and views from e-entertainment's cutting edge



GameCube off to a slow start

Despite Nintendo apparently shifting just 300,000 consoles over the launch weekend, the company remains confident that its next-gen project will prevail in the long run





Nintendo's GameCube was launched in Japan on Friday October 14 to a slightly muted reception in Akihabara. With only 450,000 units available over the following weekend, comparisons with the PlayStation2 launch aren't entirely appropriate, but given the benchmark set by Sony, which shifted 900,000 units at release, Tokyo's gaming district was eerily quiet in comparison.

A more relevant comparison would be the introduction of Sega's Dreamcast, or even Nintendo's own N64. In terms of units sold and the selection of software initially available, there were uncanny similarities with the launch of the company's 64bit console. Except, of course, that for the first time gamers were able to pick up a Sega title for their Nintendo hardware. Plus ça change.

Preorders spread purchases

In any case, Akihabara probably wasn't the best place to monitor the launch of the petite new console. With a preorder system in place that was similar to the one accompanying the Game Boy Advance launch, Nintendo's distribution channels ranged more widely. While such a strategy wasn't likely to engineer any publicity-friendly crowds, it is more appropriate for hardware that is widely perceived as a platform targeted at a younger demographic. Queues of up to 450 people in Akihabara were composed largely of western gamers eager to snap up a console in advance of the unit's European and US launches. The real action though, was at department stores like Seibu and Tobu, where parents lined up to get their hands on a preordered machine.

Nevertheless, Nikkei reported sales of only 300,000 units over the course of the weekend, which is a slightly disappointing performance in light of the 650,000 GBAs shifted in one day. More worrying were reports emerging on the Internet that the actual figure could have been much lower, with software sales correspondingly meagre. No doubt the poor weather and the fact that the launch took place on a school day contributed to a sparse turnout, and the impact of the horrific events at the World Trade Center three days earlier can't be estimated. But it's also fair to say that within Japan the line-up of *Luigi's Mansion*, *Wave Race: Blue Storm*











For those who did brave the early morning rain the reward was one of three titles to accompany the quite beautifully petite GameCube itself





Shigeru Miyamoto put in a personal appearance to endorse Shinji Mikami's decision to port *Biohazard* to GameCube



No 16bit gamer ever thought they would see the day that a Sega title, such as *Super Monkey Ball*, would appear as a launch title for a Nintendo home console







Uncharacteristically for a title appearing on Nintendo hardware, Capcom's re-imagined *Biohazard* features some fairly gruesome photorealistic sequences

and *Super Monkey* Ball, was not considered to cater to the tastes of the traditional hardcore gamer, a fact acknowledged by specialist retailer Sofmap.

Biohazard for GameCube

Should there be any doubt about Nintendo's determination to extend its audience in coming months, though, these should have been laid to rest the day before the launch. In an unexpected move, Capcom announced that it is to develop an exclusive GameCube remake of the original *Biohazard* (released as *Resident Evil* in the west). It will eventually be developing a remake of each episode in the entire series, including the first three chapters and *Code Veronica*. More importantly, *Biohazard 0* and *Biohazard 4* will be developed exclusively for GameCube. Although the press conference took place too late to buoy sales of hardware over the launch weekend, it will be followed by another Capcom GameCube announcement at the Tokyo Game Show in mid-October.

Significantly Shigeru Miyamoto joined *Biohazard* creator Shinji Mikami on stage to discuss the tie-up between the two companies, a move that is surprising for two reasons. First, Nintendo rarely sends a representative to thirdparty product announcements. And second, as the most recognisable face of Nintendo, Miyamoto-san gave the official seal of approval to the decidedly adult tone of the *Biohazard* series, pointing towards the days of the Famicom in which the appeal of Nintendo hardware wasn't restricted to an audience of children.

Certainly, the power of the GameCube has allowed a fuller expression of *Biohazard*'s characteristic gore. While the static backgrounds remain, the visual splendour of the game is far in excess of the standards set by *Code Veronica*, *Onimusha* and even *Devil May Cry* in recent months. Although it retains the core essence of the PlayStation original, realtime lighting effects complement some quite astounding backdrops that are barely recognisable from the 32bit incarnation. Footage of a sequence that takes place in a wooded area provided a tantalising glimpse of the ways in which the original remit has been expanded. Likewise, character animations are almost unprecedented in their sophistication – allowing a far more graphic depiction of the game's violence. Indeed the conclusion of the preview movie, which sees a mutant zombie decapitate Chris Redfield in an explicit display of gruesomeness served only to underline the significance of the appearance of the title on Nintendo hardware.

Mikami-san's emphasis on his company's desire to work with Nintendo exclusively in the future was accentuated by rumours from within SCEI pointing towards a troubled relationship between Sony and Capcom. The forthcoming Tokyo Game Show is likely to give a clearer indication of the latter's commitment to continue working with the PlayStation2, but it's clear that Nintendo has pulled off a major coup. The move also bolsters a thirdparty roster that includes Namco's *Soul Calibur*, *Dead To Rights*, *Smashing Drive* and *Klonoa 2: Lunatea's Veil*.

> Analysts have been less concerned by the empty streets of Akihabara. Instead they point to Nintendo's profit structure, which is the most competitive of all three hardware manufacturers

In-house powerhouse

Such a thirdparty release schedule augments the already solid roster of *Mario Sunshine*, *Pikmin*, *Legend Of Zelda* and *Rogue Squadron*, and is perhaps one of the reasons for an upbeat response to the GameCube launch from business analysts. Fears that the World Trade Center disaster will affect the US GameCube launch did result in a dip in the company's share price, but in general analysts have been less concerned by the empty streets of Akihabara. Instead they point to Nintendo's profit structure, which is the most competitive of all three major hardware manufacturers.





Although the three titles available for GameCube at launch didn't seem enough for the Japanese gaming public, titles like *Pikmin* and *Rogue Leader* will be out before Christmas







Other titles that will eventually be available on GameCube include (from top), *Mario Sunshine*, *Legend Of Zelda* and *1080°*. Nintendo will be hoping for steady sales from now on

The company itself remains bullish about meeting its target of 4m units sold by the end of its financial year next March, and despite the disappointing sales figures that have emerged, it doesn't seem too outlandish to presume that this figure will be reached with such a strong – if sparse – release schedule. But given the unanimous praise heaped upon the the system and launch software by western gamers it is disappointing that once again, Europe seems low down on Nintendo's list of priorities, with gamers having to wait until next year to sample a PAL version of *Super Monkey Ball*.

Commenting on the Japanese launch, Nintendo of Europe's managing director of sales and marketing, **David Gosen**, said: "Nintendo GameCube has certainly been turning heads in Japan, just as we anticipated. Not only has the hardware been in huge demand, but the software sales have also been very strong, proving our philosophy that although the hardware is important, it is the games that come from the hardware that really do prove the success of the platform." The GameCube launches in the US on November 18, and in Europe next year.

industryopinion

Edge asks: what do you make of the GameCube?

I started to think what the videogame had to be from now. I'm not against people who make very beautiful games. I think we need them, but I understood that the industry had to focus again on the content, on game play, on fun. Then I clearly saw Nintendo's GameCube as the only option to meet my objective.
Shinji Mikami Capcom

I think the big question is whether the recent depressing events in New York could have shifted attention away from videogames. I was surprised to learn of the small queues in Akihabara, but perhaps this was due to an increased availability of the machine in locations such as convenience stores. From what I've heard, the hardware was freely available. You can argue that perhaps if the new *Mario* title was there, it would be have been different. The three titles are well crafted, but are they killer apps?

Going forward, I'm very excited. It's a great machine. I just hope there is a good sustained amount of software available – I remember standing in EB watching the guy behind the counter take an N64 with *Zelda* off a Christmas Mum and switching it instead to a PlayStation with *Tomb Raider*, saying: "Why are you buying that? There's not many games for it, and they are too expensive. Here, this is what you need."

That said, I did think the new *Biohazard* Gamecube movie was utterly brilliant. It's all to play for.
Alex Ward Criterion Studios

The impact of the recent terrorist attacks on consumer confidence can't be overlooked, but there are other dynamics at work here too. Firstly, a launch of any new console that competes with PlayStation will never be a world-stopping event, as people interested in console games will already own a box. Consequently only the die-hard fans and early adopters will be picking up the GameCube in the first few weeks.

Secondly, Nintendo's traditional audience has always been a young one, and they may have to wait for Christmas to get their hands on a GameCube. So while the launch may not be awe-inspiring, expect continued steady sales into the new year. There's no denying the GameCube is a great device. It's a powerful, stylish and flexible system and the addition of Game Boy Advance interoperability is compelling.

Anyone who attended the Nintendo show in London and saw the gameplay options added by the GBA with motion sensor would have to agree that the combined package is exciting. However, 'neato' factor does not mean a world-beating console business. Nintendo may have difficulty when it comes to lining up the killer titles as it is directly competing with the bank accounts of Microsoft and Sony in content acquisition wars.

In the end I expect the GameCube to be a success for Nintendo, and one I think they deserve, but it is doubtful they will catch up with Sony and will have to compete hard with Microsoft soon as well.
Peter Tyson Datamonitor

The machine's specifications are great but I really don't like the small purple plastic box that it lives in. It looks too much like a cheap toy – but maybe that's what Nintendo wants the consumers to think. It's been preaching for a while now that videogames are a toy business and not an entertainment business. But is the toy business the industry we want to be working in? Toys are fads, which after a brief period of enjoyment get thrown away. That's good for short-term business because of constant churn, but is it really good for the longevity of our industry and, dare I say it, our 'art-form.'

Surely, we, the good people of the videogame industry, are working in the entertainment industry? The one that's kind of like the movie business, or the music business. We compete for the same disposable income, and the same leisure hours as they do. Sure, most of the content in those businesses is disposable, too. But some of it isn't. Some movies transcend their medium and you'll remember them for decades. Don't we want that to happen to our medium as well? Don't we want to be spoken of, one day, in the same sentences, and at the same award ceremonies as the movie and music businesses?

I wonder whether where Nintendo is heading will take us there, although its obviously working well for them so far. They aim squarely at young kids, and there's a never-ending supply of them, but what do you sell them when they get older? Surely they still want them to play games, just maybe not the same ones? There must be a happy medium, where Sony is aiming at the drug- and club-cultured 20-something, and Nintendo is aiming at the pre-pubescent schoolkid. Surely there must be something that can appeal to them all? Did anyone say Game Boy?

As for the launch? Well the world was distracted this week with more important things than the launch of a new videogame system. It's understandable that it didn't sell out – they will, I'm sure. Will they win the console war? Who knows? Will we feel comfortable using the word 'war' after last week's events? Probably not.
Jez San Argonaut

GameCube's relatively muted launch is perhaps a tell-tale sign that Nintendo has lost its usual plot. There are no killer apps, the hardware and controller (good though they are) don't do anything special, apart from be small. The most exciting thing I've yet seen on GC is the *Kirby Tilt 'N' Tumble* game demonstrated before ECTS – but that functionality should have been standard in the Cube's pad, not require [what's bound to end up as] £100 of soft and hardware in the UK.

Having said that, I'm eager to play *Pikmin*, largely because it's a new Nintendo IP that Miyamoto-san's been involved with. Sadly, those titles don't come along every day. It's also interesting to note that Sega's *Super Monkey Ball* has reportedly been the best-selling title for many importers. I've also heard stories of some people exchanging their copies of *Luigi's Mansion* for the Sega game. How's that for a sign of the times?
Anonymous developer

Of all the consoles launched in the past – well, perhaps ever – the GameCube is the one I'm most interested in buying at launch. It says 'FUN!' (yes, capitalisation and exclamation included) whereas PS2 and X-Box say 'dreary, self absorbed, pretentious, humourless dullard' (among other things).
Gary Penn Denki

Questions asked of ECTS

After another year in which many of the industry's big-hitters opted out of attending, the future of Europe's premier industry event is unsure



This year's ECTS, which was held at London's ExCeL exhibition centre from September 2-4, was once again marred by a number of high-profile non-attendees. Given the precedent set by previous years this didn't come as much of a surprise, but along with gripes from the show floor concerning the move from Olympia it does pose certain questions of the organisers.

The main dilemma is how to ensure that next year's event will be a success. Even the most optimistic observer must have found the lack of new product information dispiriting, and it was revealing that some of the biggest crowds were assembled at the Big Ben Interactive stand to play already released Dreamcast games. On a positive note however, the absence of the likes of Sony and Nintendo did leave a gap that was filled by second tier publishers eager to make their mark. Similarly, the relative lack of publishers declaring their interest in the wireless sector compared to last year was offset by the increased prominence given to the middleware sector this year.



Sergeant Kabukiman NYPD was one of many that lent welcome colour to this year's ECTS

The new, purpose-built venue was apparently a source of much discontent with those who attended the show. Complaints about the Docklands Light Railway and difficulty of access seemed to outweigh any praise for the benefits of a self-contained, air-conditioned site. Certainly the new location made it more difficult to compare the attendance with last year – and easier for cynics to declare that attendances were down. The same cynics were quick to highlight the preponderance of thirdparty peripheral manufacturers occupying a sizeable proportion of the show floor. But this wasn't an entirely bad thing. Logitech, for example, held a press conference on Sunday to announce a partnership with prestigious Italian steering wheel manufacturer Momo, which should bring cheer to automotive enthusiasts.



As ever, it was the thirdparty peripheral manufacturers who stepped into the breach vacated by the big publishers. They did so in significant numbers, prompting gripes from the more cynical attendees

Competing events

More problematic for the show organisers were the showcase events taking place elsewhere, particularly Nintendo's exhibition over at Westminster Hall, which cast a long shadow over events at ExCeL. For those lucky enough to get their hands on the eight GameCube titles and countless GBA games on display there, the line up at ECTS paled by comparison. Nintendo also used the event to announce the Spring 2002 release of its new micro handheld, *Pokémon Mini*, which will feature infra red communication to support multiplayer competition. On Saturday, EA's EAPlay event was less inspiring, though Capcom was there showing off *Capcom Vs SNK 2* and *Maximo*. Even during ECTS itself, Vivendi announced *The Thing* away from the conference centre.

Nevertheless, the absence of publishers like Eidos and Activision, who also chose to forego the high overheads of an ECTS booth in favour of the captive audiences secured at their own trade events, provided an opportunity that was seized by the likes of Rage, Ubi Soft and Kemco. The result was a variety of new titles for those who sought them out. Blizzard kicked off proceedings with an update on *Warcraft III* and the announcement that it will be joining the legion of persistent world online RPG developers with *World Of Warcraft*. Xbox software was on display at both the Rage and TDK stands, with *Crash* and *Gunmetal* at the former, and *Shrek* at the latter. Rage was also showing off *David Beckham Football*, which drew considerable attention. Meanwhile Kemco had a playable GameCube demo of *Universal Studios*, and a preview of *Batman: Dark Tomorrow*, as well as a host of GBA titles including *Phalanx*, *Boulder Dash* and realtime strategy title *Mech Platoon*. Ubi Soft also had a raft of good looking titles, such as its own PS2 *Batman Vengeance* game, *Ghost Recon* and the new *Everquest* expansion *Shadows Of Luclin*.

But the real tale of the show was the prominence of European and, perhaps surprisingly, Korean publishers who might not otherwise have got a look in. CDV Software Entertainment's *Nomads* won a coveted ECTS award, for example, and JoWood Productions and Fishtank were also present. More pronounced was the Korean contingent. The Korea Game

Despite the custom-built, air-conditioned, surroundings, there were still complaints about the new venue – principally its location

ects





Kemco announced a TV adapter for the Game Boy Advance (above)









Rage had a busy stand, showing (Clockwise from top left) *David Beckham Football*, *Gunmetal* and *Crash*, while Blizzard announced its persistent-world MMORPG *World Of Warcraft* for the PC

The real tale of the show was the prominence of European and, perhaps surprisingly, Korean publishers who might not otherwise have got a look in

Promotion Center probably commanded the largest amount of floorspace, and Amuseworld's *EZ2 Dancer* was massively oversubscribed, but there were also little-known (in Europe at least) companies such as Wizard Soft, Esaac Communication and eSofnet. *Kingdom Under Fire* developer, Phantagram Interactive, showed off several promising titles, including *Strident*, an impressive looking Xbox action title.



Logitech's sumptuous new limited edition Momo steering wheel peripheral (left)

Middleware companies thrive

Aside from game publishers, middleware suppliers had a good ECTS. Sensaura's booth was popular with attendees finding out about its 3D sound technology, while Havok was previewing its *Havok 1.5* SDK and there were plenty of smaller companies, such as Vulpine. Among them all though, Criterion stood out. Apart from commanding attention with *Burnout*, which was playable from the second day, the company also announced deals with all the major hardware platforms. Less pronounced were the developers of mobile games that were so prominent at last year's ECTS, though French outfit In-Fusio was present, as was Kuju, which announced six Java-based games. Indeed Kuju's Ian Baverstock cited



This year's turnout was difficult to compare with previous years, but ECTS did feel slightly empty

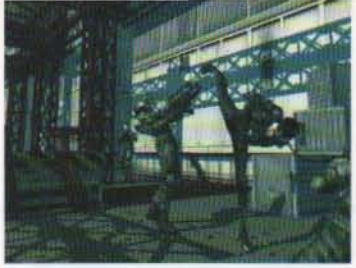


Ironically, given that it only offered existing Sega titles, Big Ben's stand was hugely popular

this year's lack of mobile developers as an ideal market opportunity. Another exhibitor, Datamonitor, also remains bullish about the potential of wireless gaming, predicting that revenues from the sector will increase from $950m (£647m) in 2002 to $17.5bn (£11.9m) in 2006.

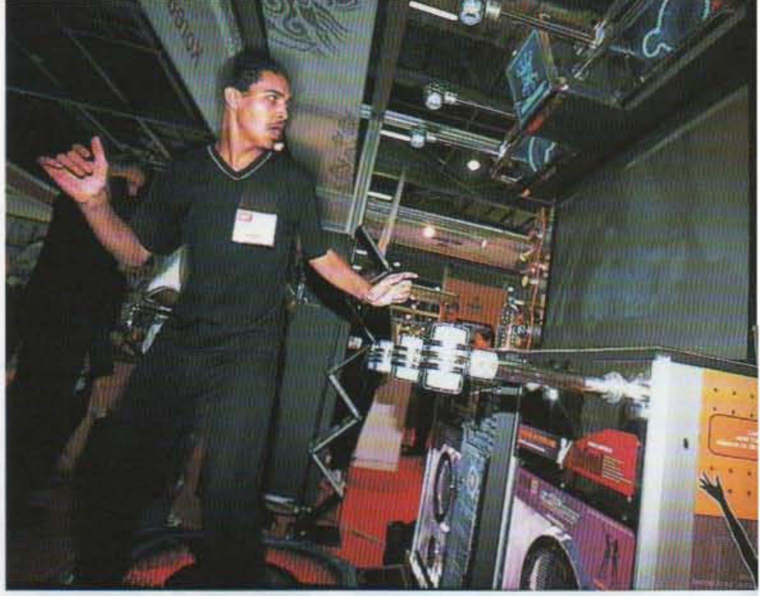
Attention grabbing

And then there was the usual suite of esoterica that by turns enraged, intrigued and confused show goers. From the deliberately provocative *Hooligans Over Europe* and *Erotica Island* to the startlingly informative Locate In Scotland and the appropriately named CD repair outfit, FUCD, there was a huge number of exhibitors who defied pigeonholing. Among the more successful low cost attempts to command attention were Arcade Warehouse's street magicians, and Troma's Sergeant Kabukiman, which each lent welcome colour to the show floor. But there were also exhibitors such as the BBFC, offering advice on its ratings guidelines, and BTopenworld, which was demonstrating its Software To Go service with technology provider Exent Technologies.





Phantagram's *Strident* (Xbox, top) and Kemco's *Universal Studios* (GameCube) both impressed



There seemed to be a heavy bent towards aerobically intense gaming cabinets, from *EZ2 Dancer* at the Korea Games Center (above) to the more specialised exercise 'em ups elsewhere on the showfloor

Where does ECTS go from here? Despite the opportunities that this year's show had to offer, the attitude of attendees was almost universally negative

But the question remains: where does ECTS go from here? Despite the opportunities that this year's show had to offer, the attitude of attendees was almost universally negative. This does seem a bit unfair in the light of the networking opportunities that the show provided – ironically, the relative lack of product on display allowed more time to be spent at the centrepiece bar chewing the fat.

It remains to be seen whether the absence of the industry's key players is down to a general malaise or whether it is due to specific dissatisfaction with the nature of the event. Certainly the longer than anticipated market downturn has stretched the resources of publishers – a fact compounded by their short-termism according to the number of developers reporting requests to develop titles in short order to be available next year. But there also seems to be a long-term trend of publishers and manufacturers pulling out of ECTS. Perhaps it would make sense to offer a day or two that is open to the public, in the interest of having the undivided attention of trade visitors on another day, since judging by the number of publishers holding alternate events there is nothing wrong with the timing of ECTS. But it would seem a shame to see removal of the event from the videogame calendar.

ECTS Awards

Once again the ECTS awards were handed out by 'Bits' girls, Emily Newton-Dunn, Emily Booth and Aleks Krotoski. The results were as follows:

Voted for by visitors to the ECTS Web site:

Best Console Of The Year:
PlayStation2 (Sony)
Best PC Hardware:
NVidia's GeForce 3
Best Console Game Of The Year:
Gran Turismo 3 (Sony)
Best PC Game Of The Year:
Max Payne (Take Two)
Publisher Of The Year:
Ubi Soft

Game Of The Show Awards, voted for by a panel of journalists:

Overall Best Game Of The Show:
Denki Blocks, GBA (Rage)
Best PC Game Of The Show:
Project Nomad (CDV)
Best Console Game Of The Show:
Universal Studios, GameCube (Kemco)
Best Handheld Game Of The Show: *Denki Blocks*, GBA (Rage)
Best Multiplayer Game Of The Show: *Anarchy Online* (Funcom)

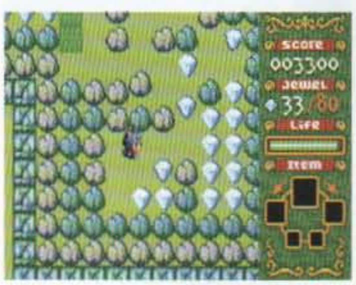
Sponsored Awards:

CTW Award For Marketing:
Infogrames, *Alone In The Dark*
MCV Best Of British Award:
Sold Out Software
Develop Magazine Award For British Game Design Innovation:
Criterion, *RenderWare*
PC Format Best New Kit Award:
NVidia's GeForce 3
PC Gamer Best PC Game Developer Award:
Bohemia, *Operation Flashpoint*
Edge Award For Excellence:
PomPom, *Space Tripper*













Some of the highlights from this year's ECTS include (clockwise from top left) Ubi Soft's *Batman Vengeance* (PS2), CDV's *Nomads* (PC), TDK's *Shrek* (Xbox), Blizzard's *Warcraft III* (PC), *Shining Lore* (PC) from Korean publisher Phantagram Interactive, and *Boulder Dash*, which is being brought to GBA by Kemco

industryopinion

Edge asks the industry for its first impressions of ECTS

ECTS was rather quiet without Nintendo, but it was a big success for Kemco, and the most important show to us in years as we will be opening a European office in October. We're also very proud of the fact that our GameCube Title, *Universal Studios*, won the ECTS award for 'Best Console Game Of The Show'. While ExCeL is a good exhibition centre, it is a little bit too far away from everything.

Oliver Gubba, Kemco

This year's show seemed to have less exhibitors and less attendees compared to any of previous shows I have attended. And it sure lacked some energy or excitement as a whole. The lack of major players surely have affected this, and I just hope it will get better next year.

Nevertheless, the show in general was good for us as it provided one of very few shows offering us a chance to see people working in the industry from all over the Europe at once. No other show offers such an opportunity, so I just hope it will be better next year.

Kimi Hoshino Media Create

We need to support the entire event. The problem with the games community is its cynicism. The British development community is the most respected and admired outside of Japan in my opinion, and if there is any European show then it makes sense that it should be in the UK. If we are not careful then it will move to France or Germany, then I'm sure people will moan more than now.

If ECTS becomes more developer focused, then that's a good thing. Everyone was still there, and even though I'm more at the business development end of things everyone needs to network. I don't care if you're a programmer or a managing director, it's necessary to know others in the industry, whether for advice or potential business opportunities, whether this is a job or a multi-million development deal.

I don't think that changing the focus to something like Milia achieves anything. Milia is not about games development, it's about content. That's why Milia works so well as a show, but also because it is supported by the people that it is intended for. If the show dies and the focus moves away from the UK then it is our fault and we will all suffer eventually.

Ben Wibberley Babel Media

Feedback from ECTS from the people we talked to wasn't entirely positive. Many felt that without the 'big guys' there was little left to get excited about and that the show was a disappointment compared to previous years.

However, we had a good show and met lots of great people. While many games companies were down about the event we met many companies involved in wireless games space who were getting a lot of useful networking done. It looks like 2002 will be a real kick-off year for wireless gaming in Europe.

In the end it seems that everyone agrees ECTS is useful but no one wants to pay for a stand. It would be a shame for the show to close so we here are hoping that CMP can work out a format that will suit the industry.

Peter Tyson Games analyst for Datamonitor

Our sister division, Criterion Software, had a stand at ECTS, so a few guys from Criterion Games went up to show off our new titles. We got a great reaction from people who came to play. It was useful to get some last minute feedback for both titles as we are close to completion. I thought the venue was fantastic, a vast improvement on Olympia. But we're an industry full of complainers so we all whinged about having to get the DLR.

I didn't leave the booth until the last day, only then did it really dawn how pants the show really was. How about those thirdparty steering wheels, then? It was probably the worst games-related event I've attended since the fateful Commodore Show up at UMIST in 1988, the one where no one but market traders turned up flogging pirated software. Highlight of the show was talking to Jeff Minter on the adjoining stand and getting positive feedback from the **Edge** forum regulars. Oh, and burning a hole in Dave Doak's jacket – a real-life *Burnout*. I'll be there next year – if there's a show that is.

Alex Ward Criterion Games

ECTS was rubbish – they've moved it out to the boondocks so it took ages to get there, and very few of the big players were exhibiting anyway, so there was almost nothing worth seeing. While the organisers can't be blamed for the lack of publisher presence, maybe next year they should think about holding the show in London.

Sebastian Grinke Pivotal Games

ECTS was a good chance to meet with Troma fans from a different community. Instead of the usual film crowd, we got to meet gaming fans that are also Troma fans. Not many were aware we have made a PC game, so they were very pleased when we told them. We on the Troma team feel *The Troma Project* will open a new audience to Troma Entertainment. We have Achim Heidelauf and Zuxxex Entertainment to thank for making *The Troma Project* a reality. The game will be on www.troma.com soon.

Doug Sakmann Troma Entertainment

The fact that the venue and surrounding support infrastructure is incomplete makes it difficult to find good accommodation close to hand and access difficult. But it was a fair show with some different exhibitors this year – the absence of the major players made it easy to move around in and I usually find little opportunity to take a tour of the show.

NASCR attends ECTS mainly to meet up with its members and have the opportunity of explaining to non-members its role within today's industry, and, as always, found itself busy enlightening visitors of how it could benefit them.

Clive Bishop National Association of Specialist Computer Retailers

Fake pubs and fake breasts should be replaced with innovative new games. Only the Korean delegation showed anything satisfactory – with what seems to be a major lead on massively-multiplayer community gaming due to broadband access and take-up. It was a great shame to see companies simultaneously piggybacking and shunning the event – the industry gives the impression that it is fractured.

Matthew Southern International Centre for Digital Content

Whatever way you look at it, ECTS is in a dire state. There is no denying that the poor publisher attendance removed a lot of business, or at least contact opportunities for journalists, retailers, distributors and developers alike. Many people I spoke to perceived ECTS to be a failure this year purely because of its emptiness, ignoring the question of whether they actually made less concrete gains from the show than in previous years. However, perception often fuels industry credibility and confidence just as much as hard business facts do, so in that respect ECTS didn't render the European industry a service either.

Looking at solutions to improve the situation, it's important to see why it was considered to be such a failure this year. It's easy to blame CMP, but let's not forget that ECTS is in a way the European industry itself. It's not fair to dismiss ECTS for being a non-event if we're not attending or, even worse, acting as parasites off-site instead, using ECTS as a good excuse to get everybody to London. Maybe there's also something wrong with our attitude, not only with ECTS itself.

Martin de Ronde Lost Boys Games

ECTS this year was more focused on companies doing business. With a number of the larger companies absent it was less of a media event than in previous years, and more to do with developers, publishers and distributors conducting business with buyers from throughout Europe and the world. The current debate is whether ECTS should be business or media focused, and we're in the process of taking soundings through research from every sector of the industry. The move to ExCeL provided the show with better facilities and on the whole was viewed as a positive aspect of the show. There's clearly a role for ECTS to play in the interactive entertainment calendar, and for 2002 we need to strike the right balance, but above all else it needs to be a show that the industry supports fully. Breakout events can only help the larger companies, whereas ECTS can provide a positive momentum for every company that attends.

Andy Lane ECTS Event Director

Praise for debut GDCE

Attendance outstrips expectations and, despite a relatively low turnout from British developers, the event is hailed a success



David Braben (above) spoke about the future of technology, showing off Frontier Development's new animation technology

Unlike ECTS, there was no carping at the inaugural Game Developers Conference Europe. In fact, the event was a notable success, setting a positive trend for the event to build on in future years. Nearly 500 developers attended the two-day conference, which took place at ExCeL from August 31 to September 1.

With a line up of speakers and topics that covered all aspects of game development, it was to be expected that some of the speakers would be less than stellar. More disheartening was the relatively poor turnout from the UK development community, which seemed to be outnumbered by European developers. But the major disappointment was that it was simply impossible, given how much was packed in to two days, to attend everything.

Despite the variety on offer, with lectures covering all sorts – from procedural generation of landscapes and localisation, to raising capital and managing intellectual property – there were certain recurrent themes. Most obvious was the need to expand the addressable market by targeting a mainstream, non-gaming audience, so it was slightly ironic that calls to address women gamers were directed at a predominantly male audience. Revolution Software's Charles Cecil directly considered this subject in his talk, entitled 'Flea-Eating Birds On An Elephant: How To Spot The True Massmarket', which asserted that narrative driven adventure games were both appealing to the massmarket and also easily turned into episodic content.

Several talks enabled attendees to glimpse titles currently in development. Peter Molyneux used Big Blue Box's *Project Ego* as a case study for his talk on the transition from PC to next-generation consoles, for example, while Demis Hassabis outlined the solutions that Elixir is using to solve the AI demands of the long-awaited *Republic*, and SCEE's Sam Coates outlined the demands of an artist on *The Getaway*. Meanwhile, there were round tables on pitching to publishers, storytelling in games and the future of online gaming.

Of course, there were some disappointments. Funcom's Ragnar Tornquist, for example set himself up for a fall when he hubristically claimed that he would teach his audience everything they need to know about storytelling. Evidently a handful of listeners thought they knew better, judging by those asleep at the end of his talk. Likewise, Louis Castle's candid summary of the company culture Westwood Studios was revealing, but **Edge** couldn't help thinking it was more suited to a US audience.



Ernest Adams was on hand to reiterate his Dogma 2001 manifesto in a speech about Technology, Creativity and Art

Excellent speakers

But these few damp squibs were more than compensated for by some genuinely ebullient speakers. It's disappointing that many attendees missed the International Centre For Digital Content's Matthew Southern, for example, due to the fact that his talk was scheduled at the same time as Peter Molyneux's presentation of *Project Ego*. Entitled 'The Cultural Study Of Games: More Than Just Games', this was an eloquent assertion that games do indeed have the power to inspire and provoke, and an impassioned plea to developers to make more culturally stimulating games, which challenge established hegemonies. While the current commercial framework of videogame development might make such a task difficult, it would surely benefit the development community to take note.

Seamus Blackley and Phil Harrison unsurprisingly had no such trouble drawing a crowd. Xbox big cheese Blackley, well known for his oratorial skills, didn't disappoint, giving an entertaining account of what console manufacturers expect of developers, outlining the 'lying game' and namechecking **Edge** in the process. Intriguingly, he outlined what he perceives to be the difference between the three major console manufacturers. Nintendo, he



The GDCE advisory board included (from left), Revolution Software's Charles Cecil, Elixir's Demis Hassabis, Gary Liddon of Climax, Martin de Ronde of Lost Boy Games, and VIS Entertainment's Chris van der Kuyl. They are to be commended for the event's positive start

While both Blackley and Harrison called for the expansion of videogame audiences, *PaRappa* creator Masaya Matsuura made it one of the central pillars of his keynote speech



With a turnout of nearly 500, attendance was better than the event organisers had anticipated, but the relatively low proportion of British developers was disappointing

GameDevelopers Conference Europe

argued, sees the game as a toy, while Sony sees it as entertainment. Microsoft, he asserted, see it as art. The jury's still out on that one, but the US launch of Xbox will undoubtedly provide a clearer indication as to whether Microsoft will be true to its word.

Harrison's keynote speech, 'The Definition Of Next Generation' was equally entertaining. Aside from optimistically (though not optimistically enough, as it turned out) asserting that England would beat Germany by three goals to one later that evening, and defining Cole's Law, he also offered a variety of possible definitions of 'next generation' and called for a reinvention of the development and distribution processes and business models that offer longer-term revenue streams. It's a shame that the PlayStation2 titles he highlighted – *Jak And Daxter* and *Primal* – didn't adequately do justice to his argument, and also that there wasn't time for questions. **Edge** would have liked to challenge his assertion that videogames offer the best value entertainment per hour, even at current software prices.

While both Blackley and Harrison called for the expansion of videogame audiences, *PaRappa* creator Masaya Matsuura made it one of the central pillars of his keynote speech. 'What Are The Cultural Borderlines Of Games?' was undoubtedly the highlight of GDCE, despite the fact that Matsuura-san required the services of a translator. Apart from handing out several copies of the *PaRappa 2* soundtrack at the end of the talk, and a demonstration of the title in action, highlights included a De La Soul music video featuring *PaRappa* samples and visual stylings.

Equally entertaining, and revealing, was a video of his development studio at work, but Matsuura-san's real thrust was for western developers to take more consideration of Japanese gamers and move away from the traditional violent staples of the videogame canon. The fact that he photographed the audience at the end was a touching display of modesty.

Hopefully, next year's GDCE will feature an equally compelling roster of speakers, perhaps with the addition of more panel-based discussions to offer a greater diversity of opinion. It is also important that the high price of the event, which deterred some developers from attending, be offset or subsidised to encourage the attendance of junior developers. But overall, the impression of the event was very much of a conference that has the capacity to go from strength to strength in future years. The proceedings of the GDCE will be made available on the event Web site at www.gdc-europe.com.

industryopinion

Edge asks the industry for its first impressions of GDCE

Overall, for a first time out, I found GDCE a great foundation on which to build a successful annual event. With the UK such a bastion of the games industry, it would have been nice to see a few more British developers, but I suppose the Germany match contributed to their absence.

Detailed presentations were a bit thin on the ground with most talks, including my own, concentrating on general production issues. Once the conference grows to a size that supports more detail it will be much easier for developers to justify attending multiple days and it would be great to see tutorial sessions.

Personally, I'd love to see more art and design sessions, plus, of course, better publicity to promote the conference and the work of the GAMA network as a whole.

Sam Coates SCEE

Although small, the conference attracted some key names. It's great to see the likes of Phil Harrison and Seamus Blackley sharing a joke and a beer. We need events like this to unite us in our common goal of creating great and accessible interactive entertainment.

As for the conference content, it was a bit like GDC Lite, but a very good start nonetheless. Hopefully GDCE will grow to a more respectable size and include separate tracks for all disciplines of game development, just like its big brother in the USA.

Dave Ranyard SCEE

In its first year, the conference was obviously finding its feet. But flashes of inspiration and a strong pan-European presence have set the foundations for an important event. It wasn't just that there were some good speakers – there were some good audiences, too. An open forum to share perspectives and experiences is much appreciated in this overwhelmingly competitive industry.

Jonathan Smith Codemasters

I was pleasantly surprised by GDCE, both by the number and quality of speakers, and the attendance. Given the bad press about ECTS, I had expected many people not to bother coming. There were both interesting and informative talks; Masaya Matsuura's talk about *PaRappa* was particularly memorable. I hope the conference continues next year and grows in size and stature. It's hard for many people to get out to the US for GDC, and prohibitively expensive for many smaller companies, and it will be great for the development community over here to benefit in the same way from the sharing of ideas and experiences.

Jeremy Longley Lost Toys

As an inaugural conference it was never going to compare with the fantastic GDC, but it should nevertheless be praised and nurtured. Matsuura-san's keynote was particularly refreshing and his philosophy of universally enjoyed games was inspirational. Perhaps if GDCE is to be improved, then it should become more distinctly 'European', with an emphasis on our unique games heritage – we can, for instance, draw upon decades of play theory to bolster our understanding of how compelling play operates, as well as our rich cultural legacies.

Matthew Southern International Centre for Digital Content

GDCE this year was pretty much a damp squib. There were few talks with real meat and little to attract the developers. It wasn't helped by running it over a weekend, holding it in one of the more inaccessible parts of London, and putting it on before the dying ECTS. But the real problem was that when you looked at the schedule there really wasn't much that was of real interest, and absolutely nothing to do in the slots when there was no relevant talks.

If GDCE is going to survive they will have to address a good proportion of these problems, and then convince us that they have.

Julian Davis Kuju Entertainment

Aibo is programmed to be attracted to things pink in colour. If someone rigs up a 'carrot on a stick' in front of Aibo, with a pink ball replacing the carrot, leaving Aibo to chase the ball futilely, would this be considered a cruel act? After all, it's a just a machine, or is it? This was a question posed by Masaya Matsuura to the audience during his Game Developers Conference Europe keynote.

Matsuura-san's keynote was one of the highlights in two days full of intellectually honest exchanges of ideas on the craft of game development. Among the nearly 500 delegates (200 more than expected) the strongest representation came from Germany, France, Scandanavia, Eastern Europe and the United Kingdom.

The GDC will continue working hard making sure the event is valuable and relevant for the European game development community. To that end, any feedback on how GDCE can be improved may be sent to ayu@cmp.com.

As far as the 2002 Game Developers Conference Europe is concerned, nothing has been set in stone, but we plan to integrate community feedback and proceed with planning next year's conference over the coming months.

Alan Yu Game Developers Conference Europe

Microsoft courts Japanese

With fears that the Xbox is set to sink without trace in Japan, the company launches a charm offensive with top local devcos







It was slightly overshadowed by Capcom's subsequent GameCube announcement, but Microsoft's recent press conference went some way to increase the esteem of the Xbox









Microsoft has so far confirmed seven titles for the Japanese launch of Xbox, including (from top), *Jet Set Radio Future* (Smilebit), *Sega GT2002* (Wow Entertainment), *Gun Valkyrie* (Smilebit), and *Dead Or Alive 3* (Tecmo). The other three titles that will be available are *Genma Onimusha* (Capcom), *Airforce Delta 3* and *Silent Hill 2* (both Konami)

After the poor reception that greeted the Xbox at the Tokyo Game Show earlier this year, Microsoft can be under no illusions as to the biggest obstacle facing its bid to dominate the likes of Sony and Nintendo: the apathy of Japanese gamers. In a bid to remedy this, the company held a conference on August 27 to outline details of the Japanese launch and to announce the signing up of several more big-name Japanese developers. As an attempt to improve the esteem in which its console is held by what is notoriously the most difficult videogame market to crack, the event was undoubtedly a success.

The performance of Hirohisa Ohura, Xbox's MD, could not have been in sharper contrast to that of Miyata Toshiyuki (president of Xbox Japan) at the Tokyo Game Show. No time was spent casting aspersions on Microsoft's competitors, and no mention was made of US titles. Instead the focus was firmly on big-name Japanese developers, most of whom also made an appearance on stage to explain why they had chosen to develop titles for the console and to give a live demonstration of their wares. As far as presentation is concerned, it was a far more impressive performance.

As well as dismissing persistent doubts about problems with Intel's motherboard design and nVidia's graphics chip by declaring the console's final specifications, Ohura-san also provided details of the Japanese launch date – February 22, 2002. Although this might be considered an auspicious date given the success that SCEI has had in Japan from basing marketing campaigns around simple, memorable dates, it will mean that Japanese gamers won't be able to get their hands on an Xbox until more than five months after their US counterparts. And, as Masaya Matsuura pointed out at GDCE, Japanese gamers don't take kindly to being treated unfairly.

It's also not certain how many units will be available at launch. Instead, emphasis was placed on the quantity of titles in development – 150 titles, currently being developed by 70 developers. The big news was that Namco announced its intent to take some of its major franchises to Xbox, including *Ridge Racer*, *Soul Calibur 2* and, significantly, *Dead To Rights*, which will no longer appear on PS2. Sega showed off *Gun Valkyrie*, *Sega GT 2002* and what was undoubtedly game of the show, *Jet Set Radio Future*. Among the other notable developers were From Software, which remains hugely popular in Japan, showing off *Bush Murakumo*, a robot-action title, and an RPG called *Gaia Blade*. Although no longer as popular as it once was, it will also benefit the Xbox that Atlus has signed up, since *Megamitensei* is both a popular franchise with Japanese gamers, as well as the console's first Japanese online title.

The focus was firmly on big-name Japanese developers, most of whom also made an appearance on stage to explain why they had chosed to develop titles for the console

Perception problems in Japan

While there is no doubt that the event marked a significant step in the right direction for Microsoft, particularly given a positive response from Japanese retailers, areas of uncertainty remain. The biggest is that the Xbox is still widely perceived as a high-performance, low-cost PC – which seems ironic given Sony's apparent desire to turn PlayStation2 into a PC. Doubts about the size of the unit and controller remain, and some enterprising Japanese companies are even rumoured to be developing business applications and drivers for the console to increase compatibility with existing PC peripherals. But also of importance is the price and functionality of the unit. With its online strategy yet to be announced, Microsoft has yet to come up with a compelling reason for an in-built hard drive, and DVD playback will require the purchase of an add-on. Yet the price of the unit – which has yet to be revealed – is expected to be more than both GameCube and PlayStation2, which now comes bundled with *Gran Turismo 3: A-spec*. With the unit launching after the lucrative vacation period, and after the launch of Nintendo's GameCube, and bearing in mind the fact that PS2 sales appear to be suffering due to the popularity of the Game Boy Advance, a prohibitive price is something that Microsoft would do well to avoid.

So, although the conference marked a clear signal of Microsoft's intent and made some inroads with Japanese retailers, the forthcoming Tokyo Game Show is likely to offer the clearest indication as to whether the Xbox can succeed in the east. Expect a full report next issue.

SIGGRAPH off the scale

World's leading 3D graphics event has its fair share of surprises and attendances continue to grow as it hits Los Angeles

As the world's leading show for 3D graphics, SIGGRAPH usually brings with it a tide of exciting new releases for the creative side of the games industry. With more than 34,000 visitors to the LA Convention Centre, this year's event – held August 12-17 – might have been lower key than previous years, but was still impressive.

Numbers were up on last year's event, held in New Orleans, and those present were able to witness the launch of *LightWave 7*, head-to-head with the announcement of *SoftimageIXSI*. Weighing in at $2,500 (£1,710), *LightWave* is the more affordable 3D graphics system. Enhancements to the application – best known for its contribution to the SFX in 'Babylon 5' – include a new motion mixer for animation, hair and fur (thanks to the incorporation of plug-in *Sasquatch Lite*) and upgrades to the renderer for control of depth-of-field, soft refraction and soft reflection. Sub-D bumps, crowd dynamics and fluid dynamics round off an exciting launch, though there's not much to appeal directly to games developers apart from the OpenGL optimisations.

NewTek is notorious for launching products before they're actually available, and although the company boasted that it shipped the first copy of *LightWave 7* at the show, it's only recently become widely available in Europe.

SoftimageIXSI 2 costs close to $8,000 (£5,500) and offers a complete 3D and animation toolset. The company has been leading the way in developing behavioural 'smart' animation systems. *XSI 2*, however, seems more production orientated. The interactive rendering feature should help game developers work faster with its realtime previews, as well as the realtime shaders. Improvements continue to be made to the non-linear animation system, character rigging and in the SDK. However, the big new feature is its built-in compositor. It should be available from October.

Hardware advances

On the hardware side, things were lower key. Rumours ran rife that SGI would announce bankruptcy at SIGGRAPH, but didn't come true. ELSA and nVidia continue to drive forward with 3D graphics chips for both the gaming market and the content creation side. An interesting demonstration of the latest iteration of nVidia's Quadro 2 technology was held at the Square stand. Scenes from the 'Final Fantasy' movie were displayed on PC monitors care of processing by PC graphics cards. Demo artists even manipulated the scenes in realtime. Impressive, but not as glorious as the film itself, nor as amusing as the clips from Pixar's latest, 'Monsters Inc'. This was one of the key attractions of the show's Electronic Theatre, where cutting edge CG shorts are aired to a whooping audience of graphics geeks each SIGGRAPH.

Games developers weren't particularly prevalent at the show – just Blizzard and a few others waving the flag – but there was a decent selection of courses and seminars for the industry. 3D modelling, OpenGL, OpenML, virtual world design, interface design, DirectX and gameplay were all covered in the learned sections of the event. This was capped off with a conference panel chaired by JC Herz (Joystick Nation) which included Ken Lobb of Nintendo America, Erik Krabber and Jack Grillo of Dreamworks Interactive, Mike Rayner from EA and David Hibbeln of BioWare. They all discussed awards they'd recently won for recent titles. Next year, SIGGRAPH heads to San Antonio, Texas.





Lightwave 7 **launched at SIGGRAPH, but will it find favour in a dev community devoted to** ***3DS Max*****? nVidia's Quadro2 chips were used to manipulate 'Final Fantasy' imagery**

CUTTINGS

Videogaming hit by attack
As well as the untold human misery brought about by last month's World Trade Center disaster the event has also cast a shadow over the videogame industry.

Amid accusations that hijackers used Microsoft's *Flight Simulator* as preparation, a number of UK retailers pulled the title from their shelves. Virgin Megastores, HMV and Woolworths all withdrew the product, with the latter also removing copies of the PlayStation2 title *City Crisis*. Meanwhile, Sega has postponed the release of *Propeller Arena* for Dreamcast, and Nintendo's shares dropped by 5.9 per cent the day before the launch of its GameCube due to concerns that disaster might affect US sales of the unit.

PC Phantasy Star Online
An announcement by Sonic Team reveals that it is to release a PC version of **Edge**'s Game of the Year, *Phantasy Star Online*, based on Ver 2.0. Running on *Windows 98*, *ME*, *2000* and *XP*, Sega claims that the title will feature enhanced graphics and will be optimised for Intel's Pentium 4 processor. A playable demo was showcased at the World PC Expo, held at Tokyo's Makuhari Messe exhibition centre on September 19.

Game Boy Madden news
EA Sports has announced a Game Boy Advance version of *Madden NFL 2002*, to be released in the US in November. Although unlikely to rival its PlayStation2 equivalent in terms of visual splendour, it will bring back welcome memories of the franchise's magnificent 16bit outings.

Codemasters and Ford forge on
An all new, next-generation version of Codemasters title *Colin McRae Rally* is currently under development. It hasn't yet been announced which platforms the title will arrive on in 2002, but a team of over 40 is hard at work, in close co-operation with Ford Racing in a bid to heighten the sense of realism.

Transworld Surf news
Infogrames has released information on a new forthcoming Xbox title, *TransWorld Surf*. As the title suggests, it's an extreme sports pro surfing game, with ingame sponsors ranging from Oakley to Quiksilver, and the rather tasteless prospect of getting eaten by sharks if you make a mistake.

Sony holds off PlayStation3
Rumours have reached **Edge**'s ears that the already much-talked about successor to Sony's PlayStation2 is not due until 2005/6. According to **Edge**'s source, the transition to PlayStation2 is perceived within Sony as having been poorly managed, and the company wants to prolong the life of the platform if at all possible. It remains to be seen what effect competitive pressure from Microsoft and Nintendo will have on these plans however.

BAFTA judging draws to a close
With the judging process near completion, nominations for the annual BAFTA interactive awards are set to be revealed on September 20, shortly after **Edge** goes to press. **Edge**'s editor was one of those deciding which titles to nominate, but readers can continue to vote for the inaugural Audience Award online at www.amazon.co.uk until October 22. The final awards ceremony will be presented by Phil Jupitus at the Grosvenor House Hotel on October 25.

DMW at Olympia
Readers wising to attend Digital Media World's GameZone, as reported in last issue, should visit the event Web site at http://www.digmedia.co.uk/. The event, which takes place on November 13-14 at London's Olympia exhibition centre, features a distinguished roster of speakers, including David Braben, Charles Cecil, Peter Molyneux, Warren Spector and Jason Kingsley.

Networkers network
Network solutions companies Tao Group and Terraplay have announced a strategic partnership to provide end-to-end solutions for networked gaming. The companies argue that the combination of Tao's binary portable intent platform and Terraplay's cross-platform technologies will allow developers of networked games to offer them across access devices with ease.

Arenatek news
New online games venture Arenatek has announced the acquisition of Wireplay's technology assets, which will enable it to offer a cross-platform, business to business services that are tailored to the needs of network operators. Arenatek's advisors include Dr Richard Bartle, one of the founding fathers of online gaming.

The Vision thing

A game engine with integrated development toolkit is the way forward according to Vulpine Technologies

Dag Frommhold, managing director of research, Vulpine Technologies





Realistic shadows within complex geometric scenes are one of the key features of Vulpine's *Vision* engine

Middleware isn't about rendering performance any more, argues **Dag Frommhold**, Vulpine Technologies' MD of research: "With our Vision engine, we offer developers the complete package – not only a fully featured rendering engine but also collision detection, physics and a next-generation toolkit."

Companies such as Criterion have embraced this philosophy with its plugable *RenderWare* platform, but Vulpine's approach harks back to the days where all-in PC engines such as *Quake* and *Unreal* ruled the roost. Obviously it will be hard to compete against the cachet of such technology, but Frommhold is convinced there is a niche for another middleware engine. "The people licensing our engine are concerned with the technological aspects we can offer them," he says. "They look at our demos, see that they are cool and then they want to get to grips with *Vision*. While we are certainly in the same market as *Unreal*, it's a different situation, because people approach Epic and say: 'You've got a big reputation. That's a great marketing argument for my title.' We're a bit cheaper than them, too," Frommhold adds with a grin.

As is traditional with German game development, the 22-strong team at Vulpine has an excellent grasp of PC technology, as will be proved by the second iteration of its *Vision* engine, to be released in October. As well as shipping with an extensive set of shaders to define complex surface and texture effects, the engine supports dynamic scene occlusion. This ensures only geometry in the line of sight of the player is drawn to screen, greatly improving framerates. "Our occlusion technology is very important, as we have designed it to integrate seamlessly between indoor and outdoor environments," Frommhold explains. He is also proud of the engine's new lighting system. "We have an additive lighting system which produces a realistic look. Because we are not rendering any light where shadows are cast, we can do neat things such as self-shadowing. Any object can cast a shadow on any other object in the scene."



Pathfinding is the most common use of AI. *Pensor's* planning routines can be spread over frames so heavy AI tasks don't result in a drop in framerate



Support for advanced shaders means that developers can create custom textures such as fur



Vision engine's use of a dynamic occlusion algorithm ensures it only renders objects that can be seen from the player's viewpoint, speeding up framerates in the process

Based in southern Germany, Vulpine has five clients signed up, and is keen to expand its reach outside continental Europe. "The UK is important for us and we are talking to quite a few companies in the UK," says Frommhold. Key announced titles using the engine include Nuclearvision's *Psychotoxic* and Happy Grafix's *Second Evolution*.

The PC-centric nature of the engine may reduce its attractiveness, though. "We have ported the engine to Linux, which isn't that big a deal for games but is important for engineering and VR simulation markets," he says. A Mac OS X version will follow this year and there are plans to move into the Xbox and GameCube space too. But Frommhold thinks it's unlikely that a PlayStation2 version will be released. "It's something we have been thinking about, and we are still thinking about it but the other two are more interesting," he confesses.

All tooled up

One of the key elements of *Vision* is *vEdit3D*, its editing and data management package. "*VEdit3D* is a completely new modelling and content management and integration package," says Frommhold. "It bridges the gap between the games editors for *Quake* and *Unreal* and professional packages such as *Maya* and *3DS Max*. This is important, because even within the same studio you have people who want to use both types of software. *VEdit3D* lets you integrate all the geometry into a single package multiple users can work on the same level using different modelling packages, and everything is automatically updated. In addition, the API is open so people can program their own plug-ins and provide their own scripting languages."

www.mindlathe.com





Nokia in the living room

Not only is Nokia's Media Terminal set-top box feature-heavy, but it's an opportunity for the open source development community to bloom



Nokia's attractive-looking Media Terminal is one of the boxes that will be vying to be the digital gateway to every home, although it's unlikely to prove tempting for hardcore gamers



Much work has yet to be done before the open source community develops compelling content for Nokia's Media Terminal. *BZFlag* is one of the few 3D games currently under development at ostdev.net

With analysts pondering the Trojan horse aspects of PlayStation2 and Xbox as digital gateways to the home, Nokia is preparing to release an equine form of darker hue into the market in the shape of the Media Terminal, due to be rolled out in Sweden in October.

While it is not a dedicated games machine to compare to Sony and Microsoft's offerings, it underlines the importance consumer electronics companies place on getting their box into the living room. "Nokia has been in the home market for 20 years with its traditional set-top box business," points out **Rickard Nelger**, head of product management at Nokia's Home Communications group. "This is not a strategic switch for the company, rather it's an enhancement of Nokia's concept of connecting people – personal, office and now home."

The Linux-based box relies on the *Xfree86* operating system and *Mozilla* browser, and also features a 40Gb hard drive, an Intel Celeron 366 MHz CPU with 64 Mb of RAM, undisclosed 3D hardware and both broadband and narrowband connectivity. As well as operating as a digital set-top box and DVD player, the hard drive means the Media Terminal can act as a personal video recorder, recording up to 30 hours of programmes to be viewed later or pausing live TV as with TiVo.

But while the hardware itself might not signal a particularly radical approach, Nokia's choice of software certainly does, for the Media Terminal is an open source device. This makes it one of the biggest opportunities for the much-vaunted Linux community to proved the value of its non-proprietary approach to software development.

Previously there have been few consumer electronics devices that use Linux, although this is beginning to change. Notably, Sony has selected the *Mozilla* browser for PlayStation2, yet no successful devices have relied on open source coders for their applications. The last attempt, from US company Indrema, ended in ignominious failure before launch. Nokia's financial muscle means this fate is unlikely to befall the Media Terminal, although its release date outside Scandinavia has slipped since it was first announced at the start of 2001. The Media Terminal will first be released in Sweden. A European rollout will now follow towards the end of 2001, with the US release in early 2002. Pricing has yet to be set.

Software development is being driven in collaboration with US open source enabler CollabNet via Nokia's Open Standards Terminal Web site. To date, around 1,600 developers have registered. Hardware development kits can be ordered through the Forum Nokia Web site.

There is a feeling, though, that while the open source movement is good at developing business and research software, it could be confusing to bring it into the massmarket. Nelger disagrees: "Nokia's approach is that the consumer will never be faced with the issue of open source." Nelger also believes that the Media Terminal is a great opportunity for developers: "They can sell games directly over the Web, or they will possibly be able to make an agreement with Nokia to distribute through NaviBars [Nokia's navigation portal]. They could also sell their product direct to Nokia, who in turn resells to consumers."

However, with only seven publicly announced game projects underway, development support staff will have their work cut out. A deal was signed with Loki, the US publisher of professionally ported Linux games, but since then Loki has filed for bankruptcy, leaving a question mark over the availability of Linux games such as *Tribes 2* and *SimCity 3000*.

But as the guidelines for games submissions specify, games should not assume the presence of a mouse, but the Media Terminal's remote control, so it's clearly not a device for hardcore gamers. As Nelger explains: "The Media Terminal contains 3D hardware in the chipset and this will be enough for the expected services and games in the family-oriented entertainment environment we are targeting."

www.nokia.com
www.forum.nokiaforum.com
www.ostdev.net

Media Terminal tech specs

Software
Linux operating system
Mozilla open source browser support for Flash, HTML 4.1, HTTP 1.1 & JavaScript 1.5, MP3, JPG, GIF, PDF, MIDI
Support for Macromedia Flash and RealPlayer
Support for USB and 1394 devices such as printers and digital camera
Email client supporting SMTP, POP3
Chat support
Upgradeable software

Hardware
Intel Celeron 366MHz processor
40 Gb hard drive
64 Mb of SDRAM
Integrated V.90 modem
3D hardware

Connectivity
Support for external ADSL or cable modem
10/100 Mbits Ethernet
Optional ISDN connection
Digital satellite, cable or terrestrial transmissions



Input/output
Output to S-video or RGB SCART
2 x USB ports
1 x PCMCIA port
2 x IEEE 1394 ports

OUT THERE
REPORTAGE



Robot Soccer 2002 offers one-on-one action with a ping-pong ball. Typical Korean night out, then



Ez2Dancer provides music for several dancing styles. A shame this one wasn't catered for



ECTS just wouldn't be the same without the bizarre, the ridiculous and the completely useless



GameBox's Dreamgun peripherals were a touch OTT. What are the odds they won't be back in 2002?



Wattley International's demonstrator can boast a nine out of ten success rate due to the lack of volunteers



The *Erotica Island* stand was one of the biggest draws, with the girls – as always – waxing lyrical

01 Show and improve

UK: With the absence of Microsoft, Nintendo and Sony at this year's ECTS it was – naturally – left to the Koreans to add some spice to a disappointing event. Accompanied with intriguing press releases and pamphlets, Game Infinity was keen to hard-sell its clients' products. Amuseworld's *Ez2Dancer* provoked the most fervour with (stooge) testers contorting their bodies in time to the seemingly random beats. Microbot's *Robot Soccer 2002* table football coin-op kept most punters happy, though its boast of 'realistic robot soccer action' may be familiar to Arsenal fans alone. Though most attendees gave Wattley International's golf and cycling peripherals a wide berth, the company's demonstrator impressed **Edge** with his enthusiasm for pointless devices. Finally, GameBox's veritable armoury of Dreamgun wireless miniguns and assault rifles went down well with most attendees. Which is more than can be said for the new and 'improved' *Erotica Island* stand, which contained more silicone than silicon.

Soundbytes

"One has to expect that decades of wheeling about in a motorised basket and speaking through a machine like Davros, whilst being venerated by naive post-docs as a paragon of wisdom simply because he's good at maths, would inevitably soften his brains. It's just a shock to see him become a gibbering bubblehead quite this soon"

'Register' correspondent **Thomas C Greene** delicately rebuffs Stephen Hawking's claim that computer AI may one day rule the world.

"Maybe Thomas Greene would like to spend a few years in a wheelchair having someone feed him through a straw and change his nappy? I don't think he'd laugh about amyotrophic lateral sclerosis anywhere near as much then"

'Register' reader **Simon Wells** takes offence at Mr Greene's comments

"If you look at the computer game industry, there are many more violent and morally reprehensible games out there. We got bored of games where you have to fight ogres and trolls and just thought it would be a nice, topical idea."

Daxarbre's chief executive, **Jason Garber**, defends *Hooligans: Storm Over Europe*, but not on grounds of its banal gameplay

"The Weight Of The Bloody Horror is On Your Shoulders."

Brochure blurb for Korean-developed *Saphie 2: Resurrection*

"Ears that take a toll due to long wearing! How about your hairstyle that was carefully set in the morning? No need to worry any more. Neckphone completely solves your problems with its non-contact wearing scheme."

Game Infinity's press release highlights the finer qualities of Neckphone technology.

Nice IDEA

Japan: Edge was honoured to appear in issue 288 of international graphic art magazine *IDEA*. Focusing on some of the most iconic visuals videogames has ever known, it was a pleasure to appear alongside the likes of *Super Mario World* and 'Star Wars'. Copies are available from your local specialist design-obsessed Japanese newsagent.

Tron and on and on

UK: *Extreme-G 3* players marvelling at how great the 20-year-old bike designs from 'Tron' still look might want to check out *Lightbikes v2.0*, a 3D PC network game created by James Payne, aka Eidolon Industries, and based on the digital racing scene from the 1982 film. Players speed fluorescent cycles around a hologram map; each cycle leaves a deadly light wall behind it, and the objective is to box your opponent in before they can cage you. As soon as you've lost a deadly game of digital chicken, the camera floats out to provide a bird's eye view of the whole map, allowing passé players to enjoy an '80s future-chic gladiatorial spectacle. With a zipfile weighing in at just 67K, Payne's design is lightweight and elegant, although speed boosts would be a welcome addition in v3.0. It is available for download at www.lightbikes.co.uk.

Gobbling up your coins

Holland: Avert your eyes, Eurosceptics, and enter *Euroman*, a Dutch-developed *Pac-Man* ripoff intended to make the transition to a single European currency a little less painful. Playing a maniacally grinning yellow Euro symbol, the player's mission is to waddle around a maze collecting as many national coins as possible before the final switchover deadline of January 1 2002. Publisher Xplorys isn't convinced the game will succeed amongst Britain's notorious Europhobes, but, from September, mainland Europe will be able to thrill to the squat currency superhero for the egalitarian sum of 7.50 euros.

Data Stream

Number of bytes of information contained on Nintendo's new Pokémon Card-e-reader-compatible cards: **3,360**

Revised launch date for the Xbox in Japan: **February 23**

Share of the software market Sega expects to hold in Japan and the US during 2003-2004: **25 per cent**

Share of the European software market Sega expects to hold in 2003-2004: **12 per cent**

Number of units Sega will have to shift to achieve this: **35 m**

Number of global units Sega is expected to shift in the current business year: **12.7m**

Number of minutes it took online retailers Amazon.com and Toysrus.com to sell their first batch of Xbox pre-sale bundles: **30**

Price of the Xbox pre-sale bundle: **$499**

Title of Funcom's new MMORPG currently in development: **Midgard**

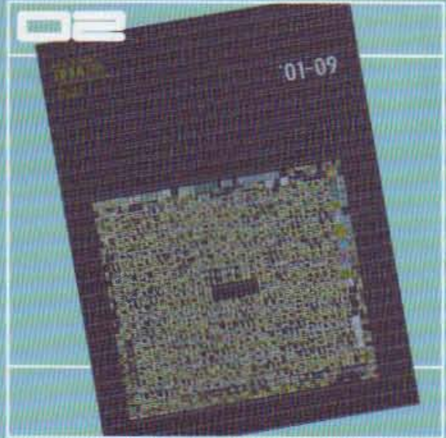
Confirmed US release date of Shenmue II: **December 4**

Sega Dreamcast title currently being ported to the PC: **Hundred Swords**

Lifespan of Nintendo's new *Pokémon Mini* on just one AAA battery: **60 hours**

Number of units *Devil May Cry* shifted in its opening week: **352,688**

Amount Konami is attempting to raise in Japan by enticing investors to purchase bonds: **¥45bn (£260m)**



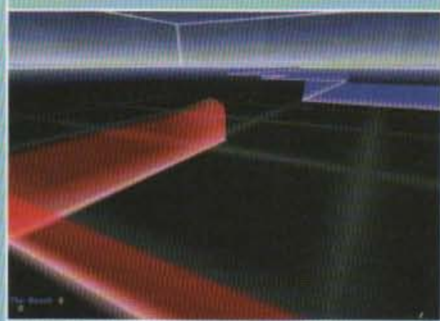


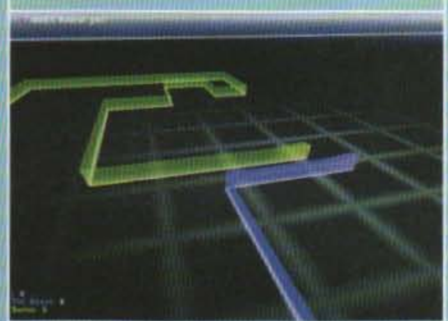
Every single cover of **Edge** exposed in the arts journal *IDEA* – even issue three's *Rise Of The Robots*



Edge's art duo finally get some recognition for its efforts with crayons, *Quark* and stuffed foxes







As ever, it's simply bright-line chicken: all those hours on mobile phone *Snake* are about to pay off



Plucky Euro-man makes his escape from the non-conformist currencies, including the cowardly Pound



Paperwork, currency, and office space. *Pac-Man* was never this much fun. Oh, hold on, it was



Over a period of months these Real Robots can be built, programmed and customised







Though the Jaguar sewing machine comes with *Mario Family*, it will accept many original designs



Expect other franchises to cash-in on the Card-e-reader system over the coming months



Just swish the card through the Card-e-reader and the data is read by the new Pokemon titles



It might be a turn-based strategy game, but it features all the Troma hallmarks – like surf Nazis



05 We are the robots

UK: Okay, it's aimed at 13-year-olds but there's something particularly appealing about Eaglemoss Publications' new *Real Robots* magazine. With one of the most ambitious cover-mount campaigns the UK has ever seen, the mag lets readers build their own cybot over a period of months. The second issue of *Real Robots* is on sale now for £3.99.

06 Stitch that

Japan: Doily lovers of the world unite. This fancy new sewing machine from Japanese company Jaguar has been developed to incorporate Nintendo's Game Boy Color. A popular exhibit at this year's Spaceworld, the Nuotto JN-2000 even comes bundled with special *Mario Family* cart. It contains all the familiar Nintendo characters, and enables users to embroider Princess Peach on a pair of underpants at the flick of a switch.

07 Card-carrying capitalists

Japan: Though *Pokémon* may be at a creative dead end, Nintendo's new Card-e-reader – used in conjunction with the Game Boy Advance – is sure to keep the franchise expanding for a while yet. Coded data on the new batch of *Pokémon* cards will allow access to secrets and characters in compatible games. The Kyoto company might as well start printing money and cut out the middleman.

08 Showfloor Troma

UK: With Sony, Nintendo, et al avoiding this year's ECTS, it was up to renowned movie production company, Troma Entertainment, to bring a bit of high-budget panache to ExCeL. It was a charge that Sgt Kabukiman NYPD, along with Tromette accomplice (sadly Super-Tromette Bulemia didn't make it to the event) fulfilled with aplomb. For those lucky enough to be assailed by the formerly mild-mannered police detective, there to promote the company's new PC title, *The Troma Project*, it was undoubtedly one of the highlights of the show. With camera in hand, they took the show floor by storm, and an **Edge** staffer – caught in front of their lens like a rabbit in headlights – by surprise.

Continue

GDCE
But shame about the lack of British developers

ECTS
Edge's ballpoint pen collection swells still further

D&D Third Edition
Edge provides the voices, *PC Gamer* the dice

Quit

PR audit
What are they thinking?

ECTS
Rage had the biggest stand. Enough said

Terrorism
Already being blamed on Microsoft *Flight Simulator*

OUT THERE
MEDIA

09 Arcade Fever

Of the two books out this month on the history of videogames (the other is 'Supercade', see below), this book is targeted exclusively at nostalgic, die-hard arcade rats. Aptly subtitled 'The Fan's Guide to The Golden Age of Video Games', 'Arcade Fever' is a colourful, US-centric, trip down memory lane by hardcore arcade gamer and pop journalist John Sellers.

Sellers – aka JAS in hi-score tables across America – begins the tale with his own initiation into his first arcade. "Being in an arcade with no money," he recalls, "was like being a sex addict at a convent: you had to do a lot of talking if you wanted to get some play."

Starting with *Computer Space* (that little acknowledged antecedent to *Pong*), Sellers marches through the years from 1971 until 1985, when, he says, "We all woke up with a killer hangover, slumped in our basement beanbags, hooked up the Nintendo NES and played games for the rest of the day."

At times Sellers' recollections read like an uncle reminiscing about the 'good old days', which you probably need to be of his generation to find endearing. And though it is packed with photos and screen grabs, the production quality is no match for 'Supercade''s coffee table credentials. Interviews with Nolan Bushnell, founder of Atari and creator of the first coin-op videogame, and other games industry illuminati add some gravitas to Sellers' commentary, but, frustratingly, 'Arcade Fever' does not attempt to tackle the deeper currents that were set in motion by the budding culture he describes, leaving the unsatisfactory feeling that the real story was somehow missed. Nevertheless, this is a light-hearted and entertaining read.

10 Supercade

'Supercade' is Van Burnham's pitch at producing a definitive encyclopaedia on the making of videogames. Using the most famous games of all time as her chapters, Burnham – a former 'Wired' magazine editor and lifelong games fiend – introduces the people, machines and events that brought them into existence, infusing the commentary with her enthusiasm and experience of playing games.

Several chapters are written by guest writers with similar credentials to Burnham. Steven L Kent, author of 'The First Quarter: A 25-Year History Of Videogames', colours his review of *Donkey Kong* with the tale of the legal struggle between Nintendo and MCA Universal over who owned the copyright of the 'Kong' name. "*Donkey Kong* is certainly one of the all-time classic games," he writes, "but throw in the mystery, history and court battles that evolved around it, and *Donkey Kong* is likely the most intriguing videogame ever made." Similar commentary placing each game in its contemporary context peppers the book.

Tracing the evolution of games from arcades to the TV screen, Burnham has adeptly compiled a fascinating compendium of facts and figures and glossy imagery. Almost half of the 440-page tome is dedicated to huge screenshots and pictures of advertising for nearly 200 games that make it an attractive coffee table artefact regardless of its content.

While some books about games, like Steven Kent's, are aimed at 'real' readers, 'Supercade' opts to please short-attention-spanned gamers who can just about manage to grab a can of Jolt in between contests of *Unreal Tournament*. To that end it is a work of perfection.

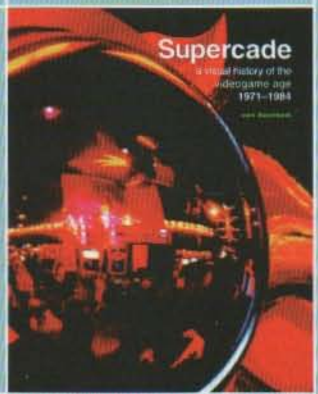
09

Author: **John Sellers**
Publisher: **Running Press**
ISBN: **0762409371**



10

Author: **Van Burnham**
Publisher: **MIT Press**
ISBN: **0262024926**



11



Site: **iSketch**
URL: **www.isketch.net/isketch.shtml**

11 Web site of the month

iSketch brings parlour games to the Net with a superb 'Pictionary'-style guessing game. Points are awarded both for quick solving and artistic competence. The usual collection of chat room opportunities are also available, but it is the sheer compulsion of producing wonderfully representative artwork which really appeals to the draughtsman inside. It's just a shame no one felt that way about **Edge**'s illustration of a ninja.

12



12 Advertainment

Japan: A few days before launch, Nintendo's GameCube marketing swirled into action with the major networks showing the first batch of GC software ads. **Edge** focuses on this water-based number.

01-04 The sound of a formidable tsunami approaching can be heard. 05-07 Voiceover (throughout advert): "Welcome to a new world of videogaming!" 08 "Nintendo GameCube." 09 "Beautiful waves but so much danger." 10-11 "Have fun on a realistic water surface which changes in realtime." 12 "*Wave Race Blue Storm*." 13-16 "GameCube!"



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

Perspective: a good time to develop some

September 4: on a late-night plane heading for the southern coast of Italy. RedEye watches the British coastline cloaking in and out, then slides his window shut. RedEye hates flying. Thank God for little distractions: the seatbelt light goes out, the GBA appears, and the tiny swivel light overhead comes on. Perfect illumination. Nintendo should bundle an Airbus with all their handhelds. The next time RedEye plans to touch a games machine is on the journey home, because, post-ECTS, the industry takes a breath. Everyone needs a break. Get some sun. Get some perspective.

September 6: a sprawling, quiet beach. The perspective from here is across a flat crystal seashore horizon. It's a bright evening, and light dances, and there are no videogames within 500 yards. The sweat and empty handshakes of conference season don't exist here. Remember how it was a few days ago? RedEye's feet curl tightly into the warm sand, and his eyes twist shut, and the voices come flooding back: the wash of the waves, the whine of Joe Industry. It's not as good as last year, it's not as good as last year... It never is.

September 2: lurking with a group of old friends at a bar inside ExCeL, the Docklands venue where ECTS 2001 is being held. Or, as popular opinion would have it, not being held; imagine a conference drawing several thousand people where the sole purpose appears to be to talk about how, this year, there's nothing to talk about. RedEye watches someone milling aimlessly about with a year-old blue PS2 bag, someone else wearing a neckstrap Konami was handing out at ECTS 2000. It's like 'I Love 19-whatever' – candy-coated nostalgia and misplaced enthusiasm for days that deserve to decompose. The Bits girls might be drawing attention on one side of the bar, but where's rentaquote Kate Thornton when you need her?

RedEye imagines her voice: "Oh, everyone remembers ECTS 2000. It was just one of those... moments, when everything fell in to place, y'know, at the right time. Unforgettable." Richard Blackwood: "Yeah, you'd go over to the Nintendo stand and play *Mario Kart Advance*, and you'd just be like... wow! Bzzzzzoooooooooom!" Gina Yashere: "And it was like bzzzzzzaaawwwwwww kch kch kch screeeeeeech!" Johnny Vegas: "ECTS? Rubbish."

Correct. Getting misty-eyed about the Olympia days is stupid, because ECTS is always rubbish. Nostalgia whitewashes the headaches and suffering, the lack of oxygen, the absolute waste of energy. Time heals; look at how easily Europeans seem prepared to forgive Nintendo for years of PAL abuse.

September 1: Westminster, heading into The Nintendo Show. RedEye's not expecting much; this is the spoonful of sugar, designed to help to soften that neglected feeling that's an integral part of being a European Nintendo fan. According to Internet rumour, the doors to Westminster Hall will magically open with a brief flash of an ECTS pass. Not for the first time, Internet rumour is absolutely wrong; regardless, there are 50 or 60 hopefuls milling around outside the venue, whining about Web site deadlines and Iwata fantasies. They will still be whining when RedEye emerges, eyes blinking at the pure white sky, some four hours later.

Inside the show, a mix of cheap-suited corporate clientele and black T-shirted European journalists make awkward smalltalk, wait for the auditorium to open, and breathe one others' sweat and acrid deodorant. It is hot, it smells of rancid man and it's all RedEye can do to hold his breath, lean against a wall and play amateur anthropologist; European businessmen stuffing their fat, tufty faces with breakfast pastries; their Japanese equivalents trying to get to the food, failing, smiling, snarling; spotted Germanic geek youth grinning wildly like All Your Base Are Belong To Him. Who could be anything but a sociopath today?

Imagine a conference drawing several thousand people where the sole purpose appears to be to talk about how there's nothing to talk about

The doors open, and the crowd surges in. It starts with ultraviolet light and a gospel choir, but the heavenly pretensions are grounded with the arrival of the marketing man's marketing man, David Gosen. His speech is the same as always – empty superlatives, meaningless statistics, evangelising the company to patience-breaking point. Midway through, as the video screen shows clips from a *Pokémon* tour of Eastern Europe and free cards being generously distributed to the masses, something strikes RedEye. It looks like stock famine footage, starving kids clawing for grain from the back of an army truck. RedEye wonders if that's how Nintendo is trying to portray itself, as philanthropic peacekeepers in the console wars. The fiscal glint in Gosen's eye every time he spits 'Pokeymon' to the crowd suggests its motives are somewhat less generous.

September 8: in the dusty, air-conditioned games room of an Italian hotel. A faded misshapen Pikachu is sloppily stencilled on one wall, but otherwise the place is exactly how RedEye remembers, right down to the pool table: no white ball, splintered cues, and a chained-down piece of chalk. A matt-black arcade shell in the corner conceals *Rainbow Islands*, the console covered in cigarette burns, just like it was the last time RedEye was here, 10 or 11 years ago. 'I Love 1990': RedEye's watchstrap was broken, there was a mosquito bite on his left calf, and Iraq had just invaded Kuwait. It's funny how some things stick.

September 12: in the queue at the check-in desk for RedEye's flight home. RedEye hasn't seen the extra security. He doesn't notice the pictures on the front of the Italian newspapers. He gets to the front of the line and finds, for whatever reason, that the airport staff won't let anyone carry hand luggage onto the plane. RedEye moves to put his GBA in his pocket. "Sorry, Sir. That has to stay in your bag. Wallets and passports only." RedEye asks why. "Because of yesterday. Because of What Happened." And in two carefully emphasised capital letters, the world changes. A two-hour flight becomes two hours of silence, turbulence, and vague incomprehension. There are no little distractions. And it all dissolves – the whining, the misanthropy, the hatred of benign nostalgia, ECTS apathy, Gosen's empty rhetoric, fear for the future of gaming – it all washes away. Perspective, you see. That's all. Perspective.

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge****'s*

One good rule of thumb for analysing entertainment is that millions of people can't be wrong. Not that everything that is highly popular is brilliant – after all, lots of people buy Celine Dion CDs. Nevertheless, the mass appeal idea is good to keep in mind as insurance against the unproductive snobbery that immediately assumes that everyone who buys million-selling product x is an idiot. It is far more useful to ask what these popular but despised products have that seems to gratify so many people.

There is a reason, for instance, why grinning convict Jeffrey Archer sells so many books. The products (coaxed and rewritten into readable shape by many unseen hands) that bear the Archer brand, while being far from beautiful in a purely literary sense, are crammed with narrative suspense and surprises. That is what many bookbuyers want, and it is what too many fey 'literary' novelists signally fail isn't always right. It was presumably commercial pressures that led the designers of *Kengo: Master Of Bushido* to throw away what made *Bushido Blade* such a fascinating and unusual product – the tactical stances and one-hit kills – and turn it into yet another beat 'em up with health bars and button-bashing combos. But let's assume that the profitable franchises must be doing something right.

EA's *FIFA* cash cow seems to have become a byword for all that is despicable about the mainstream videogaming culture. Sure, the tsunami of *FIFA* 'sequels' seems like a pretty cynical way to rob gamers of their cash once a year or more. And yet... back in 1998, during the World Cup, my flatmate and I had many sessions of beer-fuelled videogaming football. We had a copy of *ISS Pro* and we had a copy of *World Cup 98*. *ISS*, we agreed, was the beautiful game: it had better play dynamics, better controls. But despite that, we both product by itself. *Gran Turismo 3* has highly playable driving physics, but what makes people's jaws drop in HMV? What sells it? The replays. Dripping with non-interactive atmosphere. Contrarily, *Freak Out* has very interesting gameplay mechanics, but it lacks the rhythmic ebb and flow or the design variation that would make it a truly great game.

This isn't the argument of a graphics tart. It is just as true for *Tetris* on Game Boy – which marries an intuitive HCI with crisp design and irritatingly great music – as for *Jet Set Radio*, which has perhaps the most consistently achieved audiovisual design aesthetic of any game in the last couple of years. Meanwhile, the multi-platform success of *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?* shows that the proper atmospheric package can afford to farm out most of the actual gameplay beyond the limits of the hardware itself. It is a social game with the console or PC as scorekeeper, and so is no more



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Mass appeal: crediting the crowd pleasers

to provide. Archer, John Grisham, David Baldacci et al are hardly masters of stylish prose, but they deliver something else that most people want more.

Similarly, adults can sit around knowingly and sneer at the tweenies who send S Club 7 and Britney Spears to number one, but one evening a crafty DJ will put their record on in the club and they'll dance their faces off, because the programmers behind 'S Club Party' or 'Baby One More Time' are evil geniuses who know exactly how to make a popular dance record that bypasses the judgmental intellect and works directly on the spinal column.

The same holds true in the field of electronic entertainment. No videogame becomes massively successful without having anything to recommend it. This view is anathema to that of the so-called 'hardcore gamers' who regularly moan that the people who buy *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?* or *FIFA* football games or *Tomb Raider* are total morons, and what is worse, that they are actually ruining the industry.

But those games are not irredeemable garbage. In some respects they are superior to many videogames that are more widely admired among the cognoscenti. Now, of course, the market fastened on to *World Cup 98*, and played that religiously for our thrice-daily fix.

Why? Because *World Cup 98* had better atmosphere. It had better music, better crowd reactions, better commentary. It had the real World Cup teams (although the inclusion of Gazza among the England squad was a comical error). My flatmate and I could play England versus Argentina in advance, which we couldn't do in *ISS*.

No videogame becomes massively successful without having anything to recommend it – a view anathema to 'hardcore gamers'

Great gameplay cannot succeed in a vacuum, and this works in two ways. Firstly the gameplay needs to be backed up within the game as a whole by ancillary production values, such as those that *FIFA* does so well. Consider gameplay as analogous to the role of the script in the cinema industry. A good script is a necessary condition for a good film. But it isn't a sufficient condition. You also need good actors, good cinematography, good direction, and so on. Similarly, although gameplay is central to the success of a videogame, without good animation, good architectural design, a good control interface and good atmosphere, it cannot make a great contemptible than a Monopoly set. It certainly isn't harming sales of NCL product.

Secondly, videogames don't exist in a vacuum as cultural products, either. They are competing for our attention with other forms of media. So for something ostensibly modelled on the real world, such as a football or driving game, it helps to have some interpenetration between the facts of the real world and the facts of the videogame experience. Back in the old days, it was exciting just to see black stick figures running around a bright green pitch in *Match Day*. But these days gamers expect a more rounded audiovisual package for their money. Rather than dismissing EA's satisfied customers as cretins, we should demand a football game that marries the mechanics of *Winning Eleven Five* with the atmosphere of *FIFA 2001*. Then everyone can be happy.

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life Of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: trighap@hotmail.com



AV OUT

Toshihiro Nagoshi, president, Amusement Vision

A fresh start: the thrills and spills of a new challenge

Nintendo Spaceworld has ended, along with *Super Monkey Ball* development, and – with just a few days before its release – I feel relieved. But already my head is filled with 'my next dilemma'. What's this? Well, before explaining it, I would like to speak a little about my impressions about Spaceworld.

I attended the show once before, but I have to admit that I didn't pay too much attention that time. However, this time around I had a good look at everything that was on display. To sum up my thoughts, I'd say it was 'a great show'. I know that doesn't help a lot, so let me explain. The show offered a very carefully designed layout that offered players the best conditions to play the games that were available. There was a stage at the event, but it was separated from the gaming area so visitors could focus on the games. Nintendo was very impressive in this respect, and I have the strong feeling that this is the right way to design a game event, as opposed to the Tokyo Game Show, where displays and live events prevail over the gaming experience.

Of course, as a GameCube launch title, *Super Monkey Ball* was present at the show, and I was very happy to see how much kids loved the game. This is the first time that I have attempted to design a game with the intention that kids would enjoy playing it. Looking at the smiles on their faces while they were holding the controller, while they were playing my game, filled me with happiness. My staff also feel more confident as a result.

At E3 in May, I had the chance to have a look at the GameCube line up. All I can say is, *Pikmin*: what a game. Personally, I'm a committed Miyamoto fan, but even putting that to one side, this title is great and a lot of fun. I played it, and I enjoyed it so much that I have to say I marvel at his understanding of videogames – I just don't know how he does it. Let's just say Miyamoto's team is great, and *Pikmin* is a must buy. Oh, and don't forget *Super Monkey Ball* – it's a must buy as well.

Okay, let's return to my dilemma. Naturally, it's about my next project, and I've been mulling it over for days now. But I have to confess that this is something I enjoy a lot. Of course, this period of development represents a very stressful time, but it is also when you feel very excited about coming out with something new. There is also a lot of drama in this process, but as a creator it is a time when I feel I'm alive. I often ask this question to creators: "When is your happiest time when you make a game?" The most common answers are: "When I've finished the development, fully satisfied," or "When users tell me it is fun." I have also these kinds of answers: "When demand is high and the game turns to a hit," or "When my salary rises." Well, personally, I would say: "When the project starts."

The reason is, as I said before, I feel very excited. That's why I'm so happy now, but saying that I also feel that it is getting hard. Why's that? Well, I feel like I'm running out of ideas. While this is something of a joke, compared to before I think new ideas in videogames are diminishing. There are so many games, searching for fresh ideas or new ones is bound to get more difficult, no? But more than that, designing an original game which will appeal to users and be easy to play is getting still harder.

I don't believe that money and manpower alone will enable you to come up with content. I would not like it at all if that was the case

In the current market, makers are scrabbling to come up with a game like this. In some cases, a lot of money and man hours are spent in the pursuit of unique selling points for a title, and it has become something of a trend in the industry.

However, I don't believe that money and manpower alone will enable you to come up with content. I mean, I would not like it at all if that was the case. Of course, marketing is vital too, but I refuse to believe that it comes before the content. There is no point in promoting something empty. The ideal situation is when content is the sell point, and all is new and innovative. This would be the ideal situation, and is my starting point – which explains what I feel as I'm running out of ideas. Yes, it is getting hard, but I'll come up with some – I mean, I'm a pro after all. Yes, I will get this original new idea other companies have not found yet and make a wonderful game.

Nevertheless, I can't stop wondering why it is getting so hard. Yesterday, I remembered something: some time ago I tried to envisage how the market would move, and I forecast that the online gaming boom would hit console users as well, soon enough. I predicted that this would happen around the middle of 2001. Well, it seems it needs more time to happen. Studying figures, I understand that the market isn't developed enough yet. Users are starting to get interested in online, but it needs more time. If my forecast had been right, I would have entered the market. Yes, I had this vision. Now, I would be more hesitant.

Looking at the last Spaceworld, we in the industry clearly have differing understandings of the value of the online gaming market, especially evaluating the link between online and the market. I mean, looking at the show, I started to wonder whether online gaming was necessary. Of course, this market has some promising value for the coming years. But it is also true that if it does not manage to show any solid sell point, it could be difficult. Well, with a little time it may develop. I can make a promise here: if I really decide to go online, I will come up with something original and fun. I really have tons of ideas, and I would like people saying that they were impressed by my online games. My staff gets also excited when we speak about online gaming. Well, we are ready. I just need to push the start button. Something like that? Everything relies on me? Pressure. See you soon.

Toshihiro Nagoshi is president of Amusement Vision, formerly Sega subsidiary Soft R&D #4





VIDEOGAME DIARY

Matthew Gabriel, MD, Brain In A Jar

Part eight: a new opportunity

Good news has arrived at last. I hope you will all be glad to hear that we have finally signed an agreement to develop a racing product. Unfortunately, I am not allowed to speak in any detail about the product or licence as we only signed the agreement a few days ago. All I can say is that it is a large racing licence, with great potential.

We have been working with the publisher on this for some time now, not knowing until recently what the licence was. A couple of months ago all was revealed, and we have been busy submitting concept documents, brief designs, schedules and budgets ever since. It takes a while to narrow down most of the design features, and be able to generate a matching schedule and budget. I have to say the company came very close to bankruptcy, and we have survived only because of the dedication of the team. We were not able to pay salaries at the end of last month, but still the team stayed with us, and we can now pay everyone. This kind of dedication and loyalty should never be underestimated.

So now development begins. The whole team is focused on producing a full design document over the next couple of months, and looking for new staff. We need to take on up to three artists and up to two programmers over the next four or five months. Not all aspects of the game have been designed as yet, so the staff requirements may change as we go through the design process. Bringing on board new people is quite a daunting task for us, because we are very choosy, as we can't afford to take on people who either won't fit in, or are not up to scratch. It's another disadvantage of being a small developer that you can't afford to make mistakes with new staff, so the interviewing and selection process should be quite interesting. The other aspect of the team we need to consider is to try to fill any weaknesses we currently have. Again, because of our size we can't take on people who are too specialised, but we still need to make sure we've got as many of the angles covered as possible.

Nevertheless, thanks to our size we can offer new recruits an atmosphere and package that big developers generally can't. This should mean that we can grow and nurture new talent and keep it within the company. As with anything else, it's people that make the difference.

I am very hopeful that in my next article I will be able to tell you much more about the game. The publisher we are working with appears, and has so far demonstrated, to be from the planet Earth. The number of publishers that don't even have the courtesy to return your calls or reply to your mails is nothing short of staggering. A simple mail to say 'no' would be fine, because then at least you know. I can't tell you how many documents we have written, and how much time we have dedicated to some publishers, but it is incredible. And for what? You seem to be expected to do quite a lot of work for free in order to get a deal at the moment. However, it looks like ours is one of the good ones, but I will keep you informed and I'll be as honest as possible.

Anyone impressed with ECTS? Me neither. For the first time I left ECTS early, very disappointed at the number of titles being shown. The usual buzz of ECTS just wasn't there. The new venue was nice and modern and the facilities were great, but the show really missed the big players of the industry. I hope ECTS gets back on track next year, but I have my doubts. If it doesn't, then we will all be faced with having to travel to E3 to get a good look at the what's going on in the industry. For us small developers the cost of sending many people over to the US is just too great, and the net effect will be that most of the team will not get to go to any show. That can't be good for anybody, hence my hope for ECTS 2002.

Anyone impressed with ECTS? Me neither. For the first time I left ECTS early, very disappointed at the number of titles being shown

Publishers should think long and hard about this. I know the financial situation of a lot of publishers is not good at the moment, and the costs of showing at ECTS are great, but gathering together to look at everyone's games is important for the industry. Sure, we can find it all out on the net, download some low-quality movies, but it's not the same. Creative people need a creative kick up the arse every so often. A shot of game show buzz, followed by several shots of alcohol does wonders for the mind. It's a bit like a gigantic brainstorming session. You get to look at everyone else's ideas, see where they have taken those ideas, and get a feel for what worked and what didn't. Absorb the information and mix it in with your own thoughts and ideas, then new directions in which to take your ideas will follow.

The other interesting thing about seeing all these games, is getting a handle on what actually sells. I have always been amazed at the difference between what type of game a developer would want to play, and the type of game that actually sells. The difference between the hardcore market and the massmarket. Getting your hands on products that you know will be successful, and watching the response of those playing it is important. That's one of things I liked about the Japanese Game Show – the public come in for a couple of days as well. How often does the developer get to meet the customer?

I did manage to take a look at the game featured on the cover of the **Edge** 101, *Burnout*. I was a little sceptical of **Edge**'s findings, but thankfully Criterion was showing the product. Having played it I was very impressed, and there are aspects of that game that I really liked, and those have now been absorbed and will, I'm sure, have some positive effect on our next title. Designers will always strive for what can't be done, and that's good. Moving the goalposts is one of their jobs, and looking at other games can often help this.

I will look forward to next year, and hope for a drastic improvement. Having your own 'invite only' show may be good for your image, but it doesn't do much for the industry. Publishers should want all developers to see their new groundbreaking games, and they should want other developers to challenge it and improve it – otherwise what is the driving force for their teams to improve their own games?

Matthew Gabriel is the managing director of videogame developer Brain In A Jar

Edge's most wanted

Shenmue II

More advanced crate stacking, more plentiful arcade titles, more sophisticated QTEs and the prospect of meeting more sailors has the **Edge** office in raptures



(DC) Sega

Advance Wars

Tactical turn-based combat in play-anywhere GBA format. 100 battlefields, smart AI, manga styling, multiplayer modes... our order is already in



(GBA) Nintendo

Rune

A rich blend of RPG mechanics and card collection. Expect some of the more vicious creatures to bring out the top trumps in even the most hardened gamer



(GameCube) Agetec

Dead Or Alive 3

Anyone who's still convinced that Xbox doesn't have any must-buy titles must surely have forgotten about this sumptuously realised, fabulously fluid beat 'em up



(Xbox) Microsoft

Advertain me

Ducking the issue of game content

The great fury must stop for the good of all," grates a voice like pebbles washing against the shore. "You will not comprehend it now, but the very existence of the age it spawns will justify all that went before." Empty words. Meaningless drivel. Yes, it's the voiceover for the first wave of Xbox commercials.

Microsoft's new ads – presumably aired to alert consumers to the Xbox launch on November 11 – do, however, contain subtle allusions to the machine itself. The films are shot in monochrome – obviously reflecting the colour of the Xbox exterior, right? And in one ad a dark figure is seen chalking Xs into the post-apocalyptic urban landscape. It says moody, edgy. It says nothing. Guinness sales have probably doubled.

Sony famously hired David Lynch to create the surreal atmosphere for its PlayStation2 'The Third Place' ads. But doing surreal is easy. Dali got away with draping hams over twigs for decades. And turning people into ducks just doesn't sell consoles. While marketing guru Trevor Beattie happily continues to maintain that the PS2 'mind-share' is expanding to the size of his own head, potential consumers look on bemused. And then instantly forget what they've just seen.

What are the marketing people so scared of? Why the reluctance to show game content? You would think 20-something consumers are the only market they are aiming for, and perhaps we are just meant to buy our console, place it in the centre of the living room and ponder the quality of its design? Sega's Dreamcast ad campaign (does anyone now remember it?) developed along similar lines. While games as impressive as *Soul Calibur*, *Powerstone* and *Sonic Adventure* were being enjoyed by discerning gamers, those who may have been contemplating purchasing a next-generation console were treated to the image of a man shaving a swirly symbol into the back of someone's head.

One of the great modern videogame myths is the idea that Sony persuaded 'lifestyle' consumers to buy into PlayStation by promoting their product at raves with *Wipeout* imagery and leaflets drenched with drug innuendo. It helped, but let's face it, PlayStation sold on the back of quality massmarket games. At least Nintendo knows how to promote its products. Anyone experiencing one of its GBA 24:7 commercials can't but help be intrigued by the images of people lost in the tiny handheld. They have entered another dimension – but at least we get the opportunity to see what's happening there.





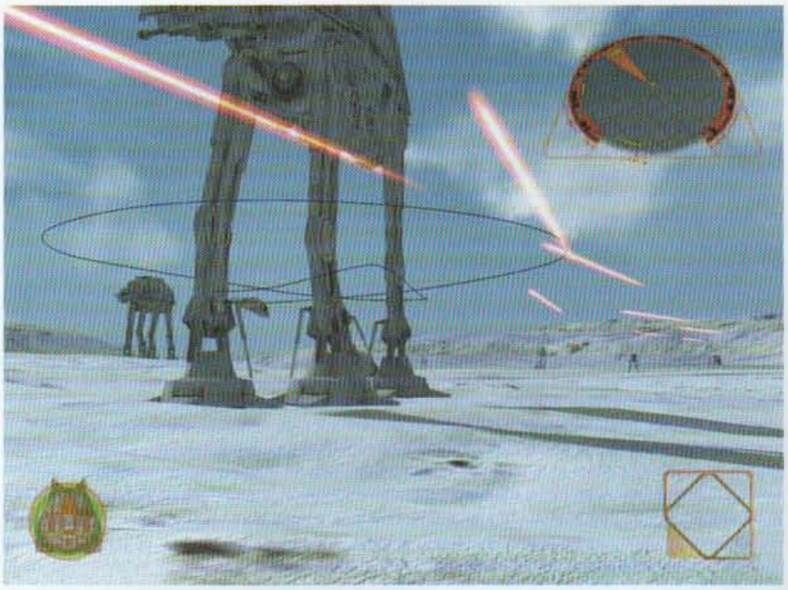




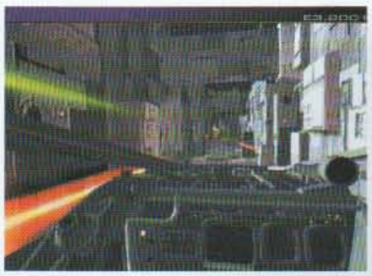


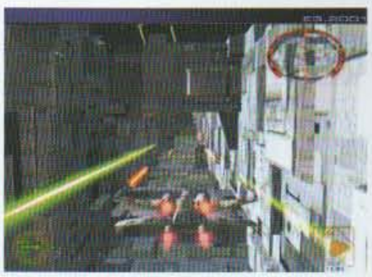
Star Wars Rogue Leader: Rogue Squadron II

LucasArts strikes back with a graphically impressive rendering of the 'Star Wars' story, but the question of whether the gameplay will match the eye candy remains



Those familiar with the play mechanics of previous 'Star Wars' licensed titles may find *Rogue Leader*'s rehashing of those past experiences disappointing. The game's short dev cycle has left little alternative



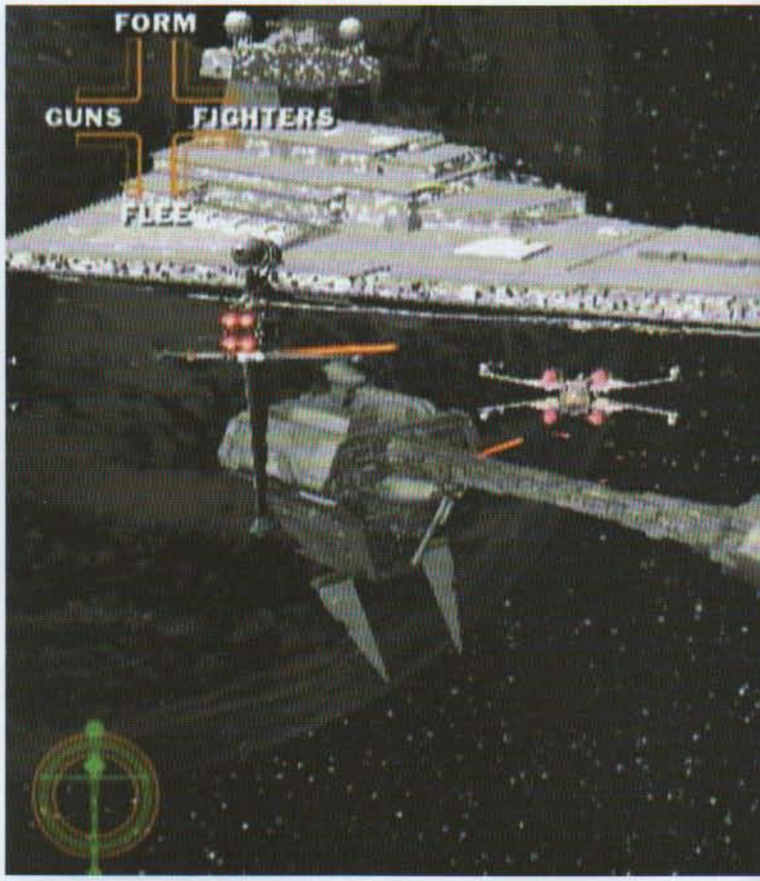


Skywalker may have been a tad wet behind the ears, but his nail-biting run down the Death Star's trench remains the defining 'Star Wars' experience

Jar Jar Binks aside, it's fair to say that 'The Phantom Menace' would have had to have been a mind-bogglingly well crafted piece of cinema if it was to have any hope of meeting the expectations of 'Star Wars' fans. To some extent, the developers at LucasArts labour under similarly weighty expectations while making their more prominent titles, but electing to make its next big release a GameCube launch title has cranked up the fanboys' fever to eleven. And so, with its gestational clock ticking to an end, *Star Wars Rogue Leader: Rogue Squadron II* steps deeper into the spotlight.

Seizing the controller at Nintendo's recent pre-ECTS show, **Edge** took its turn to swoop through several classic scenes from the original 'Star Wars' trilogy. Hoth, Bespin City in the Clouds, the Asteroid field, and – inevitably – the Death Star are among the settings in what is basically a semi-free-roaming shoot 'em up. First impressions are, well, impressive, most notably due to the subtle lighting washed over each scene. The GameCube's lighting already seems

It's obvious that the development team has shifted directly from N64 to GameCube, and have achieved a huge amount – mainly graphically



able to lend its titles a look all of their own; Xbox games seem comparatively flat and lifeless in comparison.

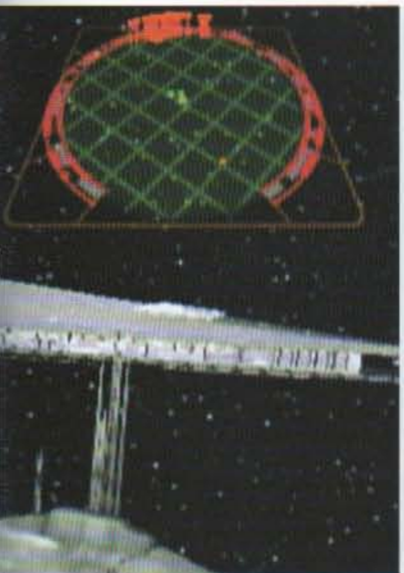
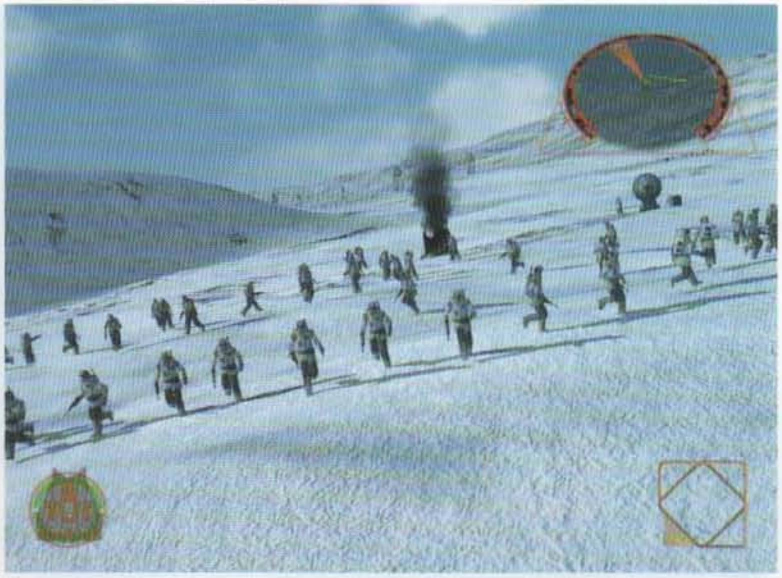
After *Rogue Leader: Rogue Squadron II*'s initial visual punch, more careful examination reveals that LucasArts has benefited greatly from being able to place much of the scenery and almost all the foes as 'instances', which involves setting up the hardware to repeatedly draw the same polygon model in different locations has huge benefits in terms of memory and rendering speed, and through this *Rogue Leader: Rogue Squadron II*'s vast landscapes have been facilitated. However achieved, visually this title will doubtless leave 'Star Wars' devotees with their jaws agape.

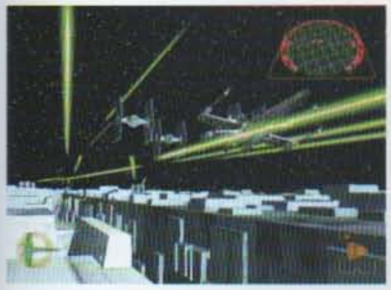
Playable craft range from the obvious (X-Wing, The Millennium Falcon, Snowspeeder) to lesser choices (A-Wing, B-Wing, Y-Wing), and all are recreated to a superb standard. The model detail and texture-mapping of enemies such as Tie Fighters, or incidental objects like Hoth's Ion Cannon, is of a standard where future improvements can only offer diminishing returns.

Among all this graphic beauty, a few elements in the ECTS build of *Rogue Leader: Rogue Squadron II* managed to jar. Some of the game's explosive effects, such as the destruction of certain surface towers on the Death Star, lack the slow, dramatic grace of their cinematic counterparts. Seemingly 200 metre-high structures are ripped apart as if by indoor fireworks. Other effects, though, are used to enhance the gameplay, most particularly the overlay visor, which is employed to spot enemy targets in battle. Overuse, however, will diminish your standing as a Jedi, encouragin the player to 'use the force' of their own skill.

Also of concern are the player cameras, which have survived from the original N64 *Rogue Leader: Rogue Squadron II* title. As before, in the more enjoyable thirdperson view, when craft are boosted or slowed with

Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **LucasArts (US) Activision (Europe)**
Developer: **LucasArts**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q4 2001 (US) TBC (UK)**

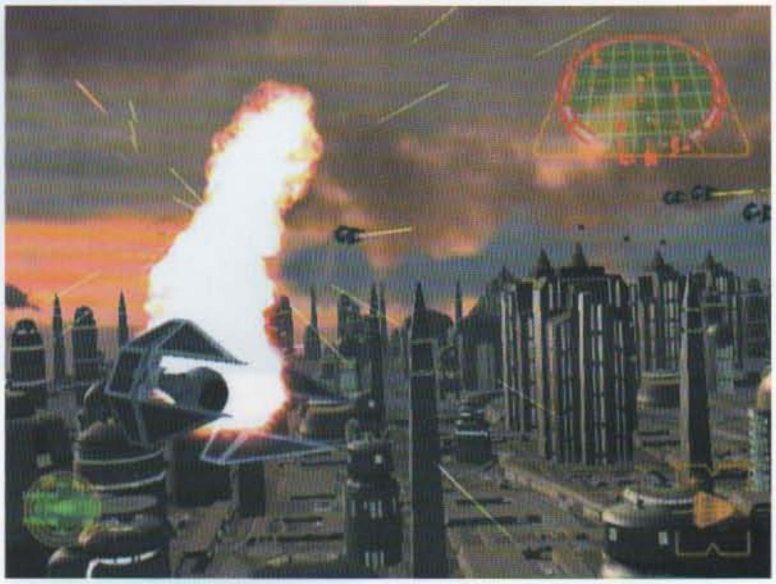

While some effects and visual details such as the laser blasts are set to stun, others – most notably the large-scale explosions – lack artistic grace. On the other hand, sections such as the Hoth assault (top) brilliantly convey involvement in an epic conflict

the shoulder keys, their position relative to the screen is too exaggerated. At speed those wonderfully detailed Snowspeeders and X-Wings disappear to a few pixels at the screen's centre. Go firstperson and the field of view can be frustratingly narrow. But it's firstperson from the Falcon's driving seat, and for many that will be more than ample recompense.

Amid the hustle and distraction of the Nintendo event it was hard to assess whether LucasArts has mastered *Rogue Leader: Rogue Squadron II*'s audio to the same standard as its visuals. Press materials boast of original actors such as Dennis Lawson (Wedge) recording new samples for the game, and interactive music utilising Dolby 5.1 is promised – despite the GameCube not supporting full Dolby Digital. The experience of running deep along the Death Star's trench as Tie Fighters swarm from rear speakers is one **Edge** looks forward to enjoying.

Mainly, though, the adage that nothing is new under the sun goes double for *Rogue Leader: Rogue Squadron II*, with its core playability and many of its stages rehashed from previous 'Star Wars' interactive outings. It's obvious that the development team has shifted directly from N64 to GameCube, and have achieved a huge amount in a very short development cycle: mainly graphically.

Swooping over the Empire's assault on the Alliance's Hoth base was novel six years ago on N64, but **Edge** wonders whether a little-changed second helping might leave the faithful fidgeting in their seats for something more. That the game is oneplayer only, when epic Tie versus X-Wing battles over the Death Star could have been delivered, is example of how limited an advance *Rogue Leader: Rogue Squadron II* may prove to be.





Edge didn't have the opportunity to sample operating the fixed gun shown above, but the ability to change craft part-way through levels has survived from *Rogue Squadron*'s 64bit incarnation

Headhunter

Thankfully, online reports of Sega's action title's untimely demise have been greatly exaggerated; the game lives on in both Dreamcast and PlayStation2 incarnations







The game's main character, bounty hunter Jack Wade, is beautifully crafted and animated. And that stylish beard is particularly tidy



Swedish codeshop Amuze is currently busy putting the finishing touches to *Headhunter*, the long-awaited cinematic action title for Dreamcast and PS2 (contrary to online reports, both versions are still scheduled to appear in the UK). The game – which could be lazily pigeonholed as *Metal Gear* meets *Resident Evil* – consists of a combination of thirdperson stealth and gunplay, featuring both roving and static camera views. However, *Headhunter* has its own set of graphical values and dynamics, and provides a welcome new slant on the action/adventure genre.

The central character is Jack Wade, a laconic bounty hunter in the employ of a quasi-governmental office called the ACN (Anti-Crime Network). The ACN is now in charge of law-enforcement and employs mercenaries to keep the peace. Wade is voiced by a gravel-voiced actor in the mould of Snake Plissken or Clint Eastwood; undeniably cheesy, yet oddly cool at the same time. Although, rather than designer stubble, Wade possesses a full beard which reduces the chic level somewhat (the game's Scandinavian origins are no doubt to blame).

The game beings with Wade narrowly escaping from a surgeon's table, stumbling, dazed and confused, into a dark and rainy night. He awakes to find himself in a hospital ward, in one piece but with partial amnesia. His goal, therefore, is to discover who he is, what events transpired prior to his hospitalisation, and which people really are the bad guys.

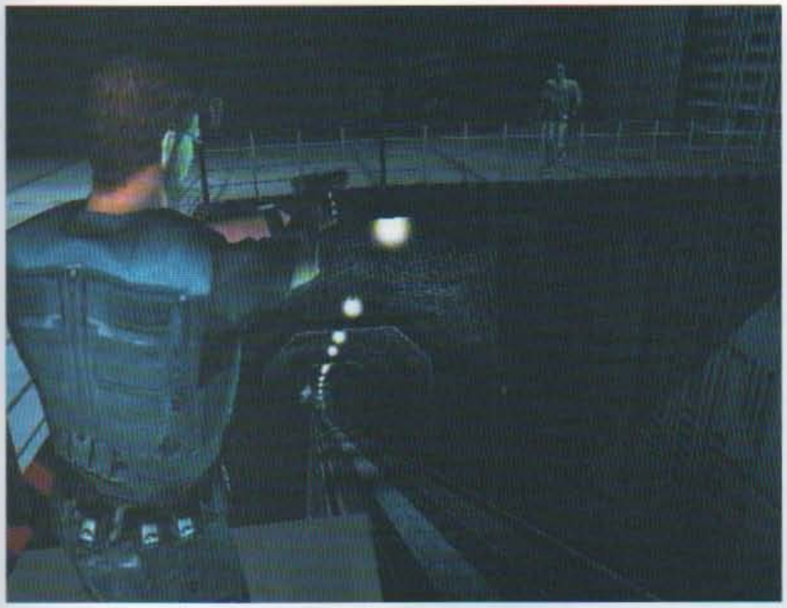
Wade's first task is to retrace his steps in an earlier case involving a small-time biker gang. But because the character is effectively rebuilding his career, he has to endure preliminary VR training sessions to regain his law-enforcement status and thus be able to bear arms. This brief section is ingeniously used to introduce the player to the control system, and get them used to thinking strategically – in *Headhunter* avoiding confrontation is often a smarter option than bursting in, guns blazing.

The game is divided up into into five episodes of four missions – each one effectively a location within the city, and linked by motorbike sections. So, having initially defeated the gang at a run-down gas station, Wade bikes his way across town to his next appointment with the gang's leader.

Surprisingly, the motorbike element of the game, while not in the least challenging, is incredibly well realised and could happily form

Players need to think strategically: in *Headhunter* avoiding confrontation is often a smarter option than bursting in, guns blazing

Format: **Dreamcast, PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **Amuze**
Origin: **Sweden**
Release: **Q4 2001**









Mission locations are linked by motorbike trips around town. Oddly, before specific locations can be entered, you need to have driven a certain distance – at speed – as denoted by an odometer-style readout

the basis of a game in itself. The bike physics are acceptable, and the bleached concrete environment of southern California has been captured with eery authenticity.

Progress is a mixture of puzzle-solving and person-shooting, and some 25 hours of gameplay is promised. Combat employs a simple lock-on system, and the player can cycle through available targets with repeated button presses. The only problem encountered so far is that sometimes Wade can be pointing far enough away from a target that no lock-on is available, even though there's an assailant in direct view. Likewise, the occasional aberrant camera angle can cause a few moments' panic.

Wade performs a variety of dramatic manoeuvres, including a forward roll to evade gunfire, crouching, and an effective back-against-the-wall move, which enables him to shuffle along to corners, fire round them, and then take cover again, in a nod to *Time Crisis*.

Indeed *Headhunter* is happy to borrow ideas from across the board, from game structure and character designs, through to the 'Robocop'-inspired tongue-in-cheek 'media breaks', which punctuate the narrative and set the tone for this bleak, totalitarian future. The Amuze team lists the work of Frank Miller among its inspirations, including selected titles from Capcom, Konami and Sega.

Extensive use of video clips and spoken dialogue help drive the story along, and it's here that a substantial amount of work has taken place. The preview code **Edge** played seemed to include pre-rendered CG, animation using the *Headhunter* engine, and newsreader clips involving real actors. Much of the FMV had yet to be completed, and so it will only become apparent how effective the overall effect is when the game appears later this year.



One of the neater aspects of *Headhunter* is the ability to shuffle up to corners, peek around and then take pot shots at the opposition. A large degree of sneakiness is needed to ensure success

Orchestrated action

The soundtrack for *Headhunter* was scored by Richard Jacques, of *MSR*, *Shinobi X* and *Sonic R* fame. It was recorded at Abbey Road Studios with the London Session Orchestra – whose credits include 'The Mummy' and 'Tomorrow Never Dies' – at a total cost of £120,000. "The music is scored much like a movie," explains Jacques. "There are themes for the main characters, which appear under different guises throughout the score. The style is like an action movie, and turns darker towards the end to fit in with the storyline. There's about 70 minutes of fully orchestrated music in the score. One nice feature is when the main character is involved in a gun fight. Here we use an action cue, but once he's defeated everybody we use some streaming and lookup tables containing tonality information so we can create a very smooth transition back to when Jack is exploring."

Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault

DreamWorks' World War II adventure moves from the console to PC, drawing on the power of the *Quake III* engine to put the player right in the thick of the action







The sniper rifle (top) will play a key role in many of the missions. Interestingly, the player also has to keep a sharp lookout for enemy snipers



There are set to be more scripted events in *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* than in any other game **Edge** has come across – yes, even more than *Half-Life*. Hopefully they won't interrupt the pace of the game

Interest in World War II shows few signs of abating. Much of this attention has been largely thanks to 'Saving Private Ryan'. But before collaborating with Tom Hanks on TV mini-series 'Band Of Brothers', Steven Spielberg helped create *Medal Of Honor*, a quasi-spinoff of his film that has grown from its 1999 PlayStation debut to a significant multiplatform franchise.

Not surprisingly, the realistic WWII action in the series has been an object of FPS envy among PC gamers, who usually get the best firstperson action games. But now *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* for PC joins the WWII party, packing the firepower required to shake the genre's bunkers to their foundations.

Players assume the role of US Army Ranger Lt Mike Powell for more than 25 levels. Powered by the *Quake III* engine, the intention is to give players a more immersive, realistic experience. "One of the guiding principles of the series has been that real life is always more interesting than anything you can make up," affirms DreamWorks Interactive producer **Peter Hirschmann**. "The team at 2015 spent hours in the classroom in the field with Captain Dale Dye, the military advisor for both 'Saving Private Ryan' and the *Medal Of Honor* series, studying the various Allied and Axis field tactics and formations."

This gritty realism is never more evident than in the level the developer revealed at E3 – a stomach-churningly authentic and atmospheric recreation of the Omaha Beach D-Day landings of June 6, 1944. The preview version contains similarly uncompromising realism, as the game's scripted sequences threw wave after wave of American soldiers up the beach and into the Nazi meat-grinder. Men with their guts blown out scream to go home;

Format: **PC, XBox**
Publisher: **EA/DreamWorks**
Developer: **2015**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q4 (US) TBC (UK)**





Having managed to safely disembark from the Higgins landing boat, with shells hitting craft all around you, it's time to hit the beach and lead your fellow soldiers straight to the front to engage the enemy





terrified privates cower behind tank defences; officers shout orders to advance. In a later level, you're required to take out advancing Nazis from your clocktower sniper nest before they can advance on a strategically crucial bridge. And it's no coincidence that it looks almost exactly like Remelle, the setting for the Spielberg film's climactic battle scene. Credit, in part, to Spielberg for taking an active interest in the game's development. "We were able to videotape about a half hour of his feedback for the development team on just the D-Day level alone," says Hirschmann. "He's the creator of the series, so he's been involved with all the titles going back to the original *Medal Of Honor*."

However, while 'Saving Private Ryan' showed horrific scenes of graphic carnage, *Allied Assault* seems to be shooting more for a Teen rating. "'Saving Private Ryan' was made for older viewers, while the motivation for Steven [Spielberg] in creating the series was to bring the WWII experience to a wider audience by keeping the material accessible," explains Hirschmann. "You can tell quite a compelling story without resorting to blood and dismemberment." That said, weapons and damage are being modelled to a level of realism consistent with the rest of the game.

The most exciting element of *Allied Assault* is the fact that you really feel like you're just a part of the overall war effort. While parts of the game consist of traditional commando-style solo missions, you'll also be spending a lot of time fighting as a part of NPC Allied squads. "There's nothing quite like a full-scale battle between Allied and German forces that you get to jump into the middle of," says Hirschmann. An early play-through also showed off some remarkable

"One of the guiding principles of the series has been that real life is always more interesting than anything you can make up"

AI and cleverly scripted scenes involving your comrades – you'll come to rely on them (and ultimately care about them) as the game wears on. On one snow-bound level that involves infiltrating a Nazi compound, an NPC buddy risks his life to silently take out a couple of sentries and open a gate.

While there's still a lot of optimisation and cleaning-up to be done, *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* looks to be on target for a November release in the US, which is likely to cue an army of deskbound gamers willingly daring the gunfire of Omaha beach.



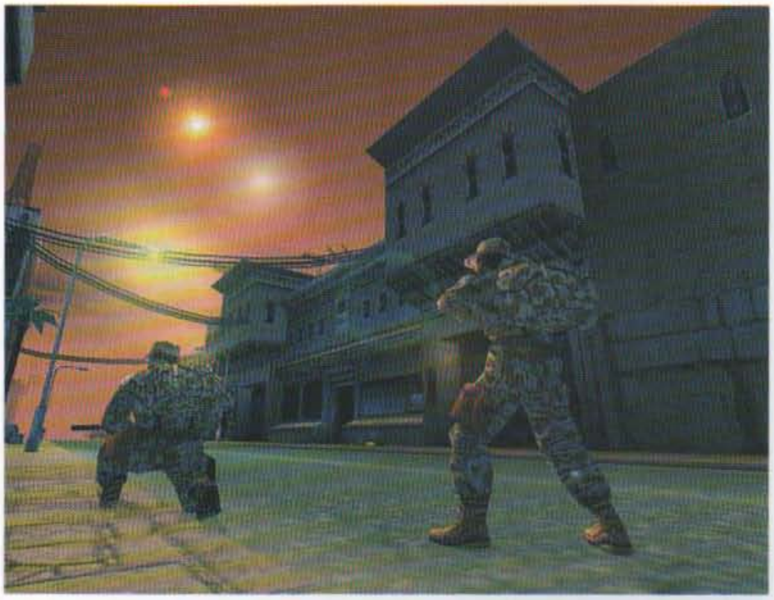


Many of the locales in *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*, appear to be taken directly from 'Saving Private Ryan'

Conflict: Desert Storm

Format:	PlayStation2
Publisher:	SC
Developer:	Pivota
Origin:	UK
Release:	200

Bath-based developer Pivotal is currently preparing a squad-based title for PS2. Hopefully its subject matter will be less contentious when its release rolls around



A squad-based tactical combat game set in the Middle East might never have been less (or more) appropriate, but it was before the events of September 11 that **Edge** visited Pivotal Studios to see *Conflict: Desert Storm*.

Born from the ashes of Pumpkin Studios – closed by Eidos as a cost-cutting exercise in 2000 – the Bath-based developer has just finished the first playable code of a game whose closest reference point could be what might happen if *Operation Flashpoint* was to lose itself in an Iraqi sandstorm and emerge as a console title.

Beginning with the 1990 invasion of Kuwait, the game follows a group of four special forces soldiers fighting behind enemy lines. Pivotal demonstrated two different levels – one based in the desert, and one inside an Iraqi-held town – and while lighting and shading effects have yet to be fully implemented, the gradual change in atmosphere as the game slips from day to night is particularly impressive. As the conditions change, so must the player's behaviour in order to adapt to the difference in visibility and enemy behaviour.



If your party is split up, either by accident or design, the AI states of the computer controlled players can be given more stealth or aggression

Control of your party is similar to that seen in Core's *Project Eden*, with the player able to switch between the four soldiers at will and issue stock commands to each. Multiplayer support similar to *Eden*'s is conceivable, though unfinalised. And there are RPG overtones, too, particularly in your party's evolution. As your soldiers progress through the campaign, they receive experience points according to their actions. Those points increase their various attributes: for example, a rookie soldier will have less weapon accuracy than one who's already completed four or five missions. While missions can be completed with just one soldier, the loss of experience gives the player an incentive to keep all their men alive.

Desert Storm is also under development for PC and XBox, and thereafter a *Conflict* franchise is conceivable, although specifics are understandably sketchy at the moment.







The 'crawl state', a now obligatory feature of all soldier sims, affords the player maximum stealth. Gulf War veterans have been eager to help with the game's accuracy, apparently





The town sequences seem a world away from the desert expanses, and tactics must be adapted appropriately. The player will have the opportunity to explore some of the town's buildings, too

TransWorld Snowboarding

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Infogrames**
Developer: **Housemarque**
Origin: **Finland**
Release: **Q1 2002**

Already Xbox seems to be the console of choice if you're into extreme sports with a downhill slant



Like *Amped*, Infogrames' title provides a predictable mixture of downhill speed and stuntwork (rails are supplied for those of a grinding bent). Indeed, comparisons may run a little too close for comfort

Xbox has yet to make its mark on High Street cash registers, and already there are competing titles vying for your attention. So while Microsoft fires the first salvo with *Amped: Freestyle Snowboarding*, Infogrames counters with *TransWorld Snowboarding*.

The game exhibits the usual sport-title dependencies on brand recognition, and has been developed in conjunction with TransWorld Media – a US publisher of extreme sports magazines – plus fashion and equipment franchises including DC Shoes, Hurley Clothing, Oakley and Quicksilver. And if that wasn't enough, the game also embraces the world of big-name pro snowboarders (cue likenesses of Barrett Christy, Kevin Jones, Jussi Oksanen... no, us neither) and it boasts 'an extensive licensed soundtrack that compliments the lifestyle aspect of the sport'. Limp Bizkit it is then...



TWS at least promises plenty of 'big air' upon its release early next year. All of the clothing and equipment is branded accordingly, sport fans

With the prerequisite fashion frippery duly accounted for, attention is drawn to the visuals which – in static form at least – impress with their near-photorealistic quality. Dispensing with the manmade obstacles of *SSX* and its ilk, *TWS* models its courses on real-world phenomena, relying on natural kickers, ramps and half-pipes for its stunt generation. However, suitably placed objects such as handrails, snow ploughs, ice blocks and downed trees also provide substance for jibbing and grinding.









Stomach-churning aerial views are all part and parcel of extreme sports titles, and in this department, *TransWorld Snowboarding* excels



Most of the game's hazards are provided by natural formations, though it's also populated by the usual piste detritus. And Housemarque isn't above slipping in a few sneaky jibes at the opposition, either

Front page news

TransWorld Snowboarding offers a range of play options – free ride, freestyle, career modes etc – and uses its publishing links as motivation for success: pull off a particularly grandiose stunt and you'll make the cover of *TransWorld Snowboarding* magazine. Unlockable levels, 20 worldwide locations and a fourplayer splitscreen mode round off the in-game options.

The final piece of the package rests upon the game mechanics, and the good news is that *TWS* pretty much amounts to a sequel of Housemarque's accomplished *Supreme Snowboarding* (seven out of ten, **E**79). Despite its PC heritage, *Supreme Snowboarding* engaged with its console sensibilities, and was praised for being the closest contender to Nintendo's superb *1080°*, out-performing the latter with its detailed environments, but ultimately falling short in terms of playability.

Video footage of alpha code shows real potential, and if the Finnish developer can capture something of *1080°*'s sublime control, then the only problem will be that *Amped* is first out of the gates.

World Rally Championship

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **SCEE**
Developer: **Evolution Studios**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **November 30**

Code of Sony's answer to *Colin McRae Rally* arrives in the Edge office, 85 per cent complete and now featuring a far more rewarding handling model

Although still undergoing development, the latest *World Rally Championship* build remains a good indication of the potential quality of the final product.

The most worrying aspect when **Edge** last sampled the game at E3 was the handling, which although clearly realism-heavy was virtually undriveable via a DualShock2. The cars' deportment is now much improved and, interestingly, offers an experience closer to *Sega Rally* than *Rally Championship*. If anything, it's a little too forgiving at this stage, allowing most rallies to be negotiated with little use of the brake button. But considering its state back in May, it's certainly a step in the right direction.

The stages themselves feel more rewarding than the majority of current rally games – there is a good balance between tight kinks and open sections, allowing the engine to reach top speed with refreshing regularity. What a shame, then, that the feeling of velocity isn't properly conveyed. In chase cam, 130mph looks like 60mph. Switching to in-car certainly speeds up matters, but you only get an accurate depiction of the action's pace during the replays. Hopefully this is one of the issues still under scrutiny.









It now comes down to gameplay, thankfully an area developer Evolution Studios has seemingly under control. The game promises the full 2001 season (14 countries, 70 stages), shakedowns (test drives), twoplayer simultaneous competitions and a Web site-based challenge mode. In addition, expect Speedster 2 and GT Force Feedback steering wheel support

New World Order

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Project Three Interactive**
Developer: **Termite Games**
Origin: **Sweden**
Release: **Q1 2002**

While Termite Games' new title is still a long way from completion, the environments already look promising





The finer details of the game mechanics underlying forthcoming *Counter-Strike* alike *New World Order* remain sketchy. But a recently unveiled tech demo of the DVA game engine suggests that, technically at least, it's one to watch.

Using 'dynamic visibility analysis', Termite Games argues that the title will feature all sorts of next-generation bells and whistles. Realtime dynamic lighting, sophisticated use of bumpmapping, complex geometry and integrated physics and animation systems have all been enabled thanks to a highly efficient rendering scheme. Importantly, 3D sound positioning will also provide a variety of auditory cues to maximise the playing experience.

Whether that playing experience is as polished as the environments remains to be seen, but an involving oneplayer mode is promised alongside the teamplay that forms the focal point of the game. Players can pick one of five character classes. Sniper, Assault, Tactical, Explosives Expert and Close-Combat Expert all have complementary sets of skills. Intriguingly, the game also boasts a fatigue system. More than that will have to wait though, with the game currently running at 50 per cent completion.





Termite Games hasn't shown off any character models yet, but judging from the environments on display, *New World Order* is demonstrably next-generation in appearance. As to how it plays, judgement will have to wait, but the team-based play looks likely to impress as much as the visuals

Battlefield 1942

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **EA**
Developer: **Digital Illusions**
Origin: **Sweden**
Release: **Q1 2002**

If, for some inexplicable reason, you feel compelled to relive World War II with up to 63 other gamers, Sweden's Digital Illusions has just what you want









Players in *Battlefield 1942* often fight as individuals, although they're granted control of various vehicles. Overall strategies are decided on large, detailed maps, and success requires a high degree of co-operation and teamwork, initiated via keyboard and audio commands

As the PC continues its relentless expansion into the online space, so more and titles are built around a multiplayer theme. However, *Battlefield 1942* – a firstperson WWII combat simulator – takes an innovative approach, in that participants assume independent roles while working towards a common goal.

The game supports up to 64 players, each of whom can assume control of various vehicles and weapons across a number of infamous war zones, such as Normandy, Guadalcanal, Kursk, Tobruk et al. But the scope of the title goes far beyond this. For instance, a group of people can elect to take charge of a bomber, with individual tasks divided between them: one acting as the pilot; one the bombardier; one the tail gunner; and so on.

"Of course, everyone will have his favourite vehicle or position to man, and it won't always be possible to get into the one you want on a very crowded server," explains producer **Lars Gustavsson**. "This is why we have put a lot of emphasis on infantry combat, so being a soldier can be as thrilling as being a tank pilot.

"A smaller [server] will emphasise vehicle combat. Bigger servers will have a more realistic approach, where vehicles are used more as infantry support."

Virtua Tennis 2

Format: **Dreamcast**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **Hitmaker**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Q4**

New shots, new courts, new players – and women. Hitmaker delivers a second serve that puts political correctness firmly in play

One of the few games worth playing at this year's ECTS, Hitmaker's sequel to one of the most engrossing tennis titles to have graced CRT monitors deservedly proved popular.

Perhaps the most immediately noticeable difference – the inclusion of female players (obviously also allowing for mixed doubles matches) – provides a slice of extra variety in terms of play dynamics. But then so does the ability to perform new cross court, drop and diving shots.

One aspect noticeable upon playing the ECTS code is that there appears to be a lot more subtlety in the control mechanics. Directional input has a far more significant effect on the ball, to the extent that serving is now a far more delicate affair; anyone used to placing the ball at the very edge of an opponent's serve box in the original game by simply pushing the analogue stick as far as it will go diagonally will now find that they overshoot their target by a surprising margin. The same required precision would appear to extend to the rest of the in-game action.

Other promised enhancements include a revamped World Circuit oneplayer option, and although specifics weren't disclosed at the show, **Edge** doesn't expect it to offer significant differences over the original – which is by no means a bad thing.





VT2 offers 16 internationally ranked men and women players: Venus and Serena Williams, Lindsay Davenport, Magnus Norman, Patrick Rafter, Yevgeny Kafelnikov, Mary Pierce, Jelena Dokic, Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario, Alexandra Stevenson, Carlos Moya, Tim Henman, Cedric Pioline, Tommy Hass, Thomas Enqvist and another, as yet undisclosed, competitor





T-Zwei






Format: **PC**
Publisher: **TBC**
Developer: **Atlanteq**
Origin: **Italy**
Release: **TBC**

Italian devco attempts a scrolling shooter for PC, but the question of whether the genre is appropriate to the platform prevails

It was a glimpse of forthcoming PC shoot 'em up *Steam Empire* at ECTS 2000 that first alerted **Edge** to Atlanteq, a year-old development house based in Avezzano, Italy. But the steampunk title isn't all the team is working on, and it's *T-Zwei* – a second scrolling shooter heading to PC and GBA – whose code has made it to the **Edge** office first, in the form of a playable technology demo.

As cynical gamers might suspect, this isn't a game that's going to destroy preconceptions of a niche genre. It scrolls left to right, there are three secondary fire weapons to destroy lots of big enemies, each level culminates in a bizarre boss with appropriate weak points, and collectable coins improve your score.

T-Zwei's main problem is that, on a platform as high-resolution and 3D-oriented as the PC, the flat imagery is quite startling; while the design of the enemies is imaginative, the artistic execution seems paper thin. That's just one problem for Atlanteq's plans for home computer arcade domination; another will be the perceived place (or lack of it) of the shoot 'em up within the PC community. On the GBA, where subtle shading and apparent depth aren't quite as crucial, *T-Zwei*'s simplicity may prosper.





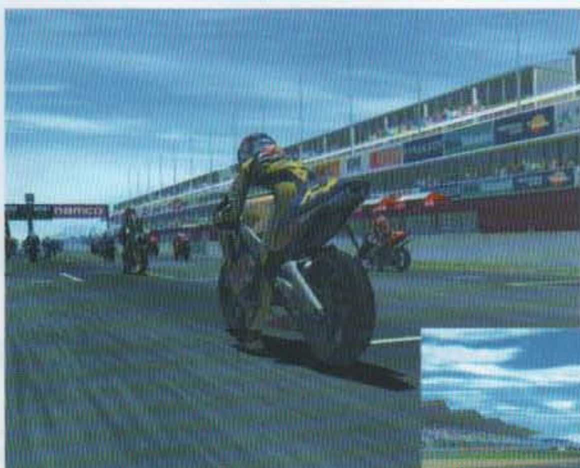

Dramatic explosions, biomechanical enemies, and over-the-top power-ups: a full complement of shoot 'em up necessities are present, but how well *T-Zwei* compares against *Gradius* et al is still to be seen

MotoGP 2

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Namco**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Q4**

***MotoGP* failed to capture the excitement of the FIM Superbike World Championship, and the sequel appears to be making all the same mistakes**






Just as **Edge** was going to press playable preview code turned up. Though clearly not finished, it's unfortunate to note that the problems affecting the original seem to have made the transition to this sequel unchallenged. Slowing the bikes down is still ridiculously difficult, their behaviour lacks dynamism and the AI opponents lack the intelligence quotient required for a thrilling contest

Perhaps understandably, the original version failed to set the PlayStation2 charts alight. Its overall repressed nature no doubt did little to impress those approaching the title expecting the kind of fun, arcade-like experience the game's visuals appeared to suggest. Of course, anyone who has experienced Namco's *500GP* coin-op – the game *MotoGP* is converted from – could easily have warned potential punters about just how disappointingly soulless the encounter could prove.

Aimed solely at the consumer market, this sequel hopes to deliver a little more in terms of excitement, although as **Edge** has noticed from recent preview code, things don't seem to have significantly improved in this respect. Certainly, improved visuals courtesy of more complex 3D bike and rider models are noticeable, but the animation routines appear to have been recycled. It's a similar story with the sound library.

Still, there are now five more tracks and all of the 2001 500cc riders have been included. **Edge** hopes to suitably appraise the game's handling characteristics – easily the most testing obstacle facing this sequel – with further play, although currently signs are not particularly encouraging. Crucially, it's still not as exciting as the real thing.



The Terminator

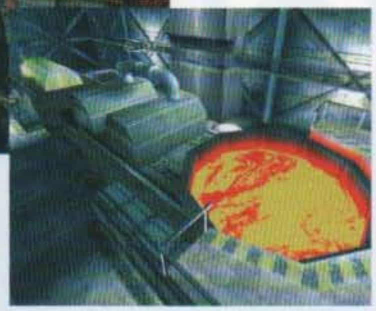
Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Infogrames**
Developer: **Paradigm Entertainment**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q2 2002**

Proving that it's never too late to cash in on a decent licence, Infogrames is about to release a PS2 version of the cult move – 17 years after the fact









With Paradigm Entertainment at the helm, hopes are high that this will, at least, provide the definitive gaming version of 'The Terminator'. Ideally, Brad Fiedel's iconic soundtrack will also make the transition intact

Based on the film franchise of the same name ('T3' is currently slated for a 2002 release), Infogrames' take on James Cameron's post-apocalyptic story revolves around events that precede the first movie, shown – fleetingly – in flashback. Discovering Skynet's ingeniously pre-emptive plan to eradicate the resistance leader's mother, John Connor and his Tech Com resistance fighters attempt to infiltrate the Skynet time-travel facility in order to send a lone warrior, Kyle Reese, back to 1984 to protect her.

Naturally, the team have to thread their way through war-ravaged landscapes, hi-tech R&D facilities and industrial hardware factories before reaching their goal. Skynet's defences consist of a variety of Hunter-Killer craft and Terminator troops, many of which have been designed specifically for this release.

The game is being crafted by Paradigm Entertainment – the technical muscle behind seven N64 titles, including *Pilotwings* and *F-1 World Grand Prix*, plus the highly-acclaimed *Spy Hunter* for PS2. Employing a thirdperson dynamic, the player is charged with the control of various soldier characters – including Connor himself. *The Terminator* debuts on PS2 next summer, with other versions due thereafter.

Dark Native Apostle

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Hudson**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Q4 2000**

The brains behind *Bomberman* (and its multitude of variants) have a crack at this cel-shading malarkey

The tortuous title, a riff on the acronym DNA and your role as a genetic experiment gone awry, calls to mind images of irreligious escapism for fans of 'The Crow' and Marilyn Manson. Actually, Hudson's take on the action/adventure genre looks like being somewhat less predictable: first impressions see it as an elder brother to *Bomberman*, and one whose comic-book darkness is stylised rather than angst-ridden.

Much of that style comes from the game's cel-shading technique, which uses heavy outlines and deep, dark, angular shadowing. The technique – scratchy and indistinct when static, but fluid and stylish in motion – means that the game looks less impressive in screenshots than it ought to, but (much like Nintendo's interpretation of GameCube *Zelda*) it's a bold move that deserves to be rewarded.

The real hook, though, comes with the lead character's genetic design. His arm contains four slots into which crystals can be inserted, each affecting a specific attribute in a predefined way. Experimentation is encouraged, but arranging crystals according to given instructions will unlock special moves and abilities, often required to solve puzzles. Expect a full analysis of *Dark Native Apostle* before year's end.









DNA's striking cel-shaded visuals provide the main allure, although the game features enough originality to be worthy of investigation

Neocron

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **CDV Entertainment Software**
Developer: **Reakktor Media**
Origin: **Germany**
Release: **Q4 2001**

Live the cyberpunk dream in the massive – and massively multiplayer – online Neocron metropolis

The natural limits imposed on the target audience of persistent world online titles, by niche subject matters and a finite number of hours in the day, don't seem to have deterred a wave of developers who are currently exploring alternatives to the *Everquest* and *Ultima Online* universes. Like *Anarchy Online*, *Neocron* opts for a dystopian sci-fi virtual world in place of the more staple swords 'n' sorcery setting. Where it differs from most other MMORPGs is that its German developer aims to place a premium on accessibility, borrowing some of the dynamism of traditional firstperson shooters.

Which isn't to say that it is bereft of the complexity normally demanded of the genre. The city of Neocron, realised with an impressive 3D engine, is composed of four districts, as well as an underground sewer complex and surrounding wasteland, and eventually characters will be able to access two other cities and two space colonies. Each area will have varying degrees of player security, raising the possibility of players adopting a mercantile role, as well as those of private eye and hacker.

However, the real draw is likely to be the relatively cheap price, with a monthly subscription currently pencilled in at $10 (£7) a month.









Although similar to current MMORPG offerings in many ways, *Neocron*'s most distinguishing feature is its emphasis on FPS-style action. An in-game arena raises the possibility of holographic deathmatches in the style of *Quake Arena* or *Unreal Tournament*

Maximo

Format: **PS2**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Q1 2002**

Ghouls 'N Ghosts is made anew for the 21st century as Capcom goes back to its roots and delivers a hack-and-slash adventure on PS2









The rather tired *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* hack-and-jump action benefits greatly from weapon upgrades and a number of instantaneous power-ups. Being able to customise the hero adds RPG elements and should ensure that the game contains some replay value

Hearing the familiar *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* sound effects, now digitally re-mastered for this 128bit update, is enough to send shivers down the spine of any Capcom retrohead. In fact, many of the customary motifs from the series return: coffins spewing zombies, bone towers, gargoyles and, of course, the hero's embarrassing display of underwear should his armour be stripped away. Maximo can even be turned into a small child or old man should he come under a sorcerer's spell.

But apart from the obvious 3D makeover, Capcom has added a number of extras to strengthen the formula. Most interesting is the opportunity to customise Maximo throughout his quest. Up to 40 special abilities are promised, including powerful weapon and shield upgrades. A novel continue system prevents backtracking by enabling the hero to collect spirits and purchase death coins from the Grim Reaper.

Yet for all the tweaks and enhancements there is something a little too familiar about the recipe. Playable code currently indicates enjoyable, if not electrifying gameplay. Hacking at creatures while collecting tokens and coins is slightly stilted, though final tweaking and the introduction of potent bosses may provide more drama.

Scooty Races

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **TBC**
Developer: **Trecision**
Origin: **Italy**
Release: **TBC**

As befits a game coded in sunny Italy, this PS2 title features brightly coloured scenery and a massmarket mode of transport







The cel-shaded stylings of *Scooty Races* mark it out as something a little different, at least. The imagery is sketchier than *Jet Set Radio*, with lop-sided buildings and haphazard architecture reminiscent of primary school paint classes



The name's strikingly ridiculous, but **Edge** has actually been tracking *Scooty Races* for some time, having chanced upon some imaginative concept work a few months ago. A meeting with the developer at ECTS finally brought an opportunity to witness the game firsthand; the code **Edge** saw was running at an unplayable frame rate, but it was enough to convince that *Scooty Races*, if it fulfils its potential, will be the best scooter racing game ever.

Tongue-in-cheek genre commentary aside, the game structure appears to be race-based, albeit in a relatively freeform manner, with five separate environments and multiple courses running through each. The game will initially appear on PlayStation2, with a PC version to follow and other formats possible for the future, and a licensing deal with a major scooter manufacturer has just been signed, lending a little weight to what might otherwise be easily dismissed as an Italian (exhaust) pipe dream.

The lack of any properly playable code makes assessing *Scooty Race*'s charms too difficult to comment upon, but **Edge** hopes it finishes up closer in spirit to *Jet Set Radio* than the abhorrent *Yanya Caballista*. With any luck, the name will turn out to be a working title, too.

Polaroid Pete

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **JVC**
Developer: **Irem Software Engineering Inc**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Q4 2001**

Joining the throng of 3D racers, FPSers and platformers comes just what the PS2 ordered – a photography-based explorathon

Once again, those in search of the innovative, original or just plain weird, need only glance Eastwards. Irem – purveyors of finely hand-crafted shoot 'em ups – have reappeared from the depths of obscurity with a game called *Polaroid Pete*. The title originally appeared in Japan under the guise of *Gekibo 2*, and has since been picked up by JVC for a European release in conjunction with Polaroid.

This off-beat title features the image-capturing skills of one Pete Goldman, an eager newshound intent on gaining the Pulitzer prize for his photographs of bizarre Japanese events. Thus the game takes the player on a trip through 14 varied locations from cityscapes to sports events and, ultimately, Pete's own wedding.

The game is riddled with oddities – not to mention a host of movie references – and photographing specific items opens up the occasional bonus level. Success relies on exploration, timing and getting the 'money shot', as it were. Also, with film at a premium, the player can't just go snap-happy: patience is rewarded with a more striking image.

Clearly *Polaroid Pete* takes its cue from the likes of *Pilotwings* and *Pokémon Snap*, where you're judged on the quality of your art. Released in December, *Polaroid Pete* could be well worth snapping up.





Like some wide-eyed stalking paparazzo, *Polaroid Boy*'s central character chronicles Oriental events with his camera. Exploration – and being prepared to wait for that really great shot – is the key to success





Rubu Tribe

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Interplay**
Developer: **Outrage**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q1 2002 (US) TBC (UK)**

Interplay places its trust in the little people with an intriguing concoction that defies categorisation

Admittedly, it's tough to get a handle on Chicago-based developer Outrage's new title. Part 3D thirdperson platformer, part resource-management game, and part puzzler, *Rubu Tribe* doesn't fit neatly into any genre. Of course, that's the point.

The game revolves around the Rubu colony's quest to reach a holy temple and recharge the tribe's life-giving 'Muku ball'. Since they're so tiny, however, they enlist the help of a gigantic creature, the Uut. Being clever little folk, the Rubu build a small village on top of the travelling Uut, then patrol the path ahead for dangers.

"The puzzles are a bit different from what gamers are accustomed to," explains lead designer **Nate Goudie**. "Since *Rubu Tribe* takes place in a natural environment, the resources are more organic in nature. Learning about the creatures, plants, weather, and other things is pivotal." Your most important assets are your fellow tribe members. Using your 'order horn', you can command your troops in some way: just select the horn, target an item, then decide which class of Rubu (scholar, worker, or warrior) you want to use to interact with the item. Getting it all to work properly will be a balancing act of epic proportions, but like the Rubu themselves, we're sure the team will persevere until the job gets done.









The Rubu and the Uut (above) form a symbiotic relationship of sorts. As the leader of the Rubu, you need to make sure your Uut is well cared for as you travel through many strange lands

Hunter: The Reckoning

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Interplay**
Developer: **High Voltage Software/Digital Mayhem**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q1 2002 (US) TBC (UK)**

Resident Evil meets *Gauntlet Legends* in a violent world populated by vampires, zombies and other grisly monsters









Each of the hunters has a unique set of magic spell 'edges', but it's hard to beat a good shotgun (above). The camera is quite dynamic, often zooming right up into the action or pulling back to keep every hunter onscreen. Some monsters defy description, however

Interplay's upcoming 3D multiplayer-focused action-horror title *Hunter: The Reckoning* takes place in a world overflowing with creatures of the night. And in one small town, a former prison infested with vampires, zombies and other abominations has just unleashed its denizens upon the world. That's where you and your friends come in. You're 'hunters', previously ordinary humans gifted with the ability to see monsters for what they truly are.

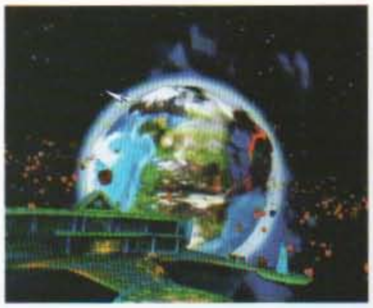
Gameplay is largely inspired by *Gauntlet Legends*, with up to four players dismembering hordes of enemies on a shared screen, but with a horror setting and increased RPG elements. Hunters gain 'conviction' by slaying enemies, which fuels their use of special abilities and 'edges', the game's magic spells. The control scheme is reminiscent of *Robotron*, in which one stick moves the character and the other stick aims. There are four hunters, each with abilities designed to complement the others' talents, and the entire game is being crafted with multiplay as the primary game mode, despite a decision not to include online features.

Even at this early stage, *Hunter: The Reckoning* has impressive visuals. If its tried and true game mechanic proves similarly well realised, **Edge** will be tracking it down in the spring.

Starfox Adventures: Dinosaur Planet

Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **Rare**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **2002**

Fox McCloud returns for more asteroid-avoiding adventures, but this time the shaggy sharpshooter has the opportunity to climb from his craft and explore new worlds







The C-stick calls up Fox's inventory, from which weaponry or objects can be selected and used. **Edge** selected a small ball, which, when thrown, gets retrieved by your baby dinosaur companion



Piloting an Ar-Wing's like riding a bike; you never forget. Fox McCloud's something of a veteran these days, so playing the space-bound sequence that has the vulpine hero cutting through a heavy asteroid field is bound to provoke something of a nostalgia trip. While there appears to have been very little evolution since Argonaut's initial *Starfox* flight, the game style is still entertaining.

On land, things aren't so familiar. The draw distance, character modelling, and scenery are all impressive, as are the luscious hilly surrounds. Attacks with Fox's staff are based on timing and position rather than a more complex control system. A range weapon is also available, but selecting it prevents Fox from moving and causes the game to switch to a firstperson perspective.

The worry is that there's no subtlety or invention. Unlike, *Rogue Squadron*'s imagery or *Pikmin*'s imagination, there's nothing in *StarFox* that grabs the attention, nothing that astounds. It looks competent, and while that amounts to damning with faint praise, at the moment it's justified; *Metroid Prime* might be causing the most tremors of concern around Nintendo fans, but *Dinosaur Planet* also has much to prove. The fact that it won't see a release until well into 2002 gives Rare plenty of time to do just that.

Kaisertal



Format: **Game Boy Advance**
Publisher: **TBC**
Developer: **Formula**
Origin: **Holland**
Release: **Q4**

Dutch developer Formula instils its scrolling shooter with a distinctly Japanese flavour, following closely in *Bangai-o*'s footsteps with strikingly effective results



It's unlikely to be the only scrolling shooter to appear on GBA, but high production values and an endearing reverence for Japanese gaming culture bestow a unique charm upon the title. Add to this an interesting power-up system and the requisite hordes of advancing enemies, and *Kaisertal* looks like another convincing prospect for the platform



After being impressed with the early promise shown by 2D scrolling shooter *Kaisertal* back in issue 94, **Edge** was pleased to be able to get its hands on a near complete version at the ECTS bar that bore out those first impressions.

Under development by Formula, the handheld division of Lost Boys Games, the game's unique features include night and day settings, as well as variable weather. But the real selling point is the presentation, which calls to mind *Bangai-o* in its cheesy but charming strangeness.

Like *Bangai-o*, the action is punctuated by a series of dialogue boxes that impart information to the player. And, as in *Bangai-o*, this is done in such a deliberately captivating way, and is such a clear homage to Japanese mistranslation, that it's difficult not to be drawn into *Kaisertal*'s slightly skewed world. On top of this presentation the game boasts a power-up structure that dares to deviate from the tried-and-tested *Gradius* formula, granting a large degree of player choice. It's these elements that make it such a joy to play, adding to the GBA's growing armoury of first-class titles.





Dialogue boxes pepper the action to punctuate the frantically paced action. Anybody familiar with the charmingly bizarre boxouts featured in *Bangai-o* wi be on familiar ground. Which is surely a good thing

Mercedes-Benz Champions

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **TDK Mediactive**
Developer: **Synetic**
Origin: **Germany**
Release: **Q4 2002**

The German car manufacturer hits the virtual road in a title that promises much in terms of the realistic rendering of the driving experience

One of the more pleasant surprises of ECTS was the behind-closed-doors demo of a driving simulation which **Edge** attended, admittedly more by good fortune than any concerted strategy. The game – which goes by the working title of *Mercedes-Benz Champions* – is being coded in Germany by Synetic in conjunction with DaimlerChrysler, whose previous work includes *Mercedes-Benz Truck Racing*.

As you'd expect from a premier brand like Mercedes, the developer is going to extreme lengths to recreate the exact physical characteristics of each featured car. "All our work is based on original data from Mercedes," explains **Jürgen Kersting**, head of the Synetic team. "To allow the player to experience the feel of the different models on the road in a virtual environment, we not only constructed 3D models of the vehicles that are faithful to the originals, but also used precise data material on driving behaviour and the particular characteristics of each vehicle. This allows us to precisely simulate the peculiarities and special features of each car in the game."

The player is presented with a series of driving tasks, and depending on their performance (things like tyre wear and speed are taken into account) they can progress to more challenging courses, including full-on racing events.





The highlight of the ECTS demo was a track designer (left) enabling the player to construct a looped track from Bezier-style curves. Once the loop is closed, the track is 'dropped' into the 3D landscape, where textures are automatically applied





Master Rallye

Format: **PC, PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Microids**
Developer: **Steel Monkeys**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Q4**

From the dirt kicked up by Acclaim's Paris-Dakar licence, a contender emerges promising the most exciting depiction to date of endurance off-road rallying







Mitsubishi, Renault, Toyota, Nissan, Citroën and Land Rover represent the various competitors of these type of events. So don't expect comprehensive damage to make the final version (if at all). The PC version of *Master Rallye* should offer multiplayer LAN/online play



In a world where the rally genre is in serious danger of becoming seriously oversubscribed, it's encouraging to come across titles that offer an angle substantially different from the norm. *Master Rallye*, like Acclaim's Paris-Dakar game, focuses on an endurance event.

Licensed on one of the FIA Off-Road World Cup rounds, the Master Rallye race sees competitors attempting to navigate through six countries to reach Moscow ahead of the competition having left their starting point, Paris, some 5,000km behind.

The game has improved significantly since its appearance at Milia last February. Handling, although still a touch over-realistic for control via a joypad, is coming along competently – the potential to balance authenticity and gameplay is there.

The courses are based on real data from previous Master Rallye races, and have been constructed with the assistance of the official course designer. As is typical with this kind of event, you're not confined to a single route – it's your job to find the quickest route.

Although few details concerning structure are currently available, the ability to drive the race in a single session in oneplayer mode is expected.





Dead Or Alive 3

New ladies, new locations and raft of new refinements – and only on the all-new Xbox. Edge casts an eye over the fighter that Tecmo's Team Ninja claims will knock seven bells out of the fourth instalments of *Tekken* and *Virtua Fighter*

When Tecmo's original *Dead Or Alive* was released back in 1996, it was little more than a *Virtua Fighter 2* clone with explosive boundaries, additional countermoves and female fighters with breasts that aggressively over-obeyed the laws of physics. The graphically stunning sequel, 1999's *Dead Or Alive 2*, weighed in as a solid contender, further developing the series' trademark elements: a dynamic fighting engine, huge arenas, and a disproportionate number of blatantly sexy combatants.

While the series has evolved nicely, it was not until the team stepped up to the power of the Xbox hardware that *Dead Or Alive* has become something more than a second-tier fighter. *Dead Or Alive 3*, now just months from completion, may have what it takes to do what *Metal Gear Solid 2* and *Gran Turismo 3* will do for PlayStation2 and what Mario and Zelda have done for Nintendo – that is, to provide a gameplay experience so rich and rewarding that gamers will buy the system just to play it.

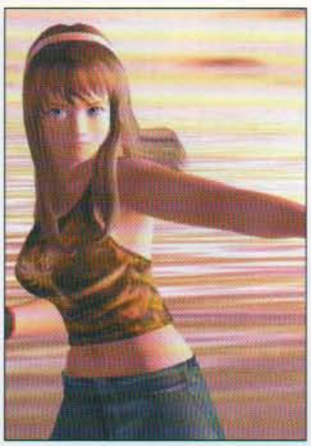
Balancing act

Fighting game sequels often make the mistake of changing either too little or too much. *Tekken Tag Tournament* did the former, being basically a prettier *Tekken 3* with a tag battle added. *Virtua Fighter 3*, with its wildly varying terrain, its decreased leaping, and its emphasis on executing moves swiftly instead of strategically, exemplifies the latter. *Dead Or Alive 3*, however, seems to be evolving perfectly, incorporating new concepts while simultaneously continuing to



Subtle effects are everywhere, from sunlight slanting through trees to the lifelike ripples and wrinkles in the fighters' outfits





Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Microsoft**
Developer: **Tecmo (Team Ninja)**
Release: **November 8 (US) TBC (UK)**
Origin: **Japan**

Photography: **Hiroki Izumi**



In the final version of the game, Itagaki intends to introduce the animation of individual muscle groups, so the fighters will flex believably as they deliver bone-crunching punches and kicks

refine the combat system. **Tomonubu Itagaki**, head of Tecmo's Team Ninja and creator of the series, credits this surefootedness to the team's habit of completely deconstructing the game with each new generation.

Starting over

"Mostly, we start from scratch," he reveals. "We look through every spec in the game, and if there's anything we feel that we can use we will pick it out and use that part. But even then it will still be upgraded and refined."

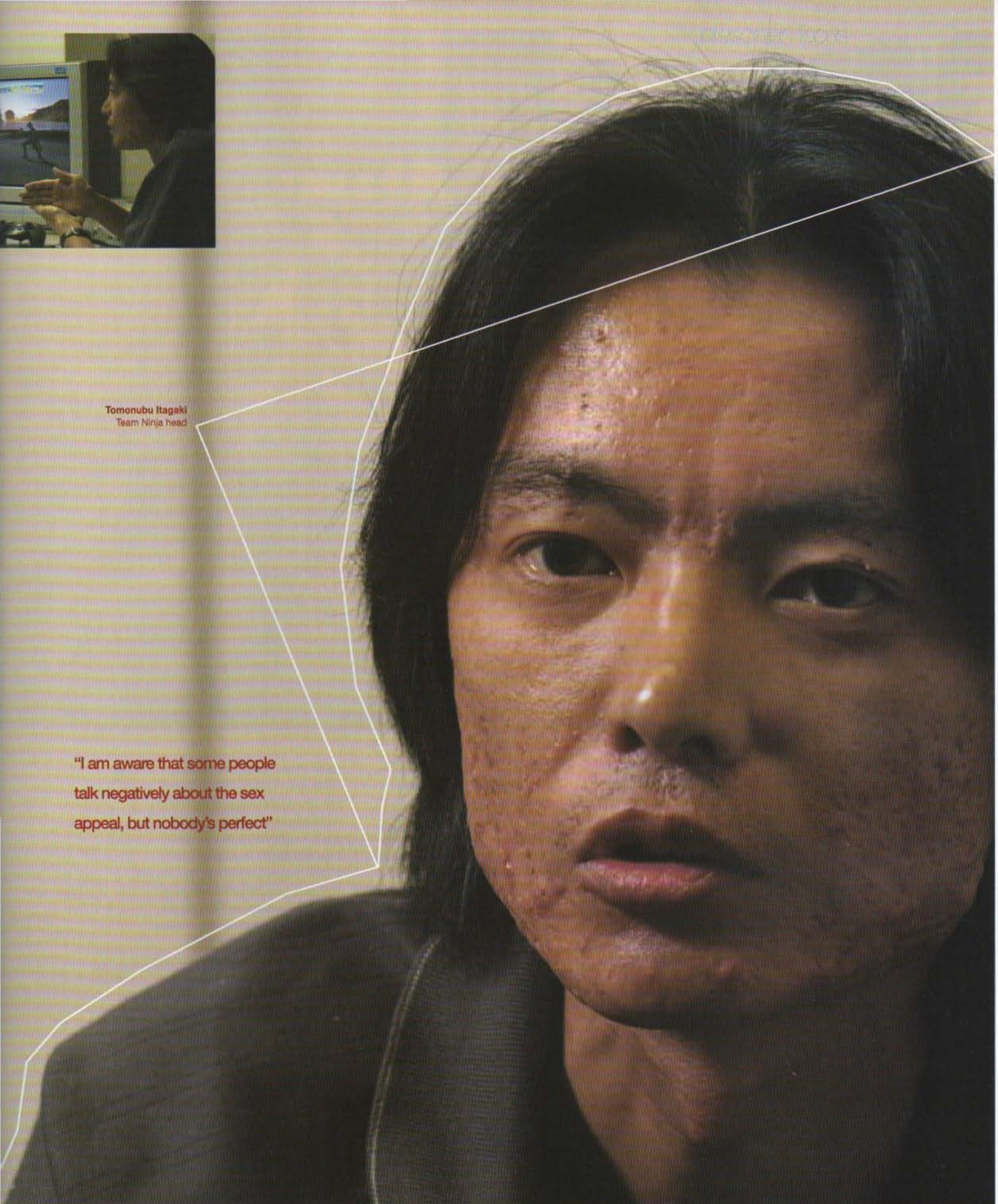
Itagaki wastes little time in pointing out these refinements. Many are in the game's finely tuned fighting engine, as when he demonstrates one of the new moves – a reversal that not only puts his Kasumi behind Ayane, but leads to a spine-snapping new special attack.

As the lesson in technique proceeds, the battlefields themselves also impress. Each area drips with lush textures, lavish lighting, and innumerable extra cosmetic touches that reinforce the sense that the game exists in a living, breathing world. Itagaki gracefully slams his foe into one of the countless trees in a forested area, then points out the leaves that flutter down as a result of the concussion. We then switch to a snowy cavern lit by startlingly realistic torches. Here Itagaki opts to bounce his adversary into one of this stage's many icy stalagmites, which shatters into fully textured 3D shards. Another stage, a candlelit dojo, comes





(Left) Hitomi, in the gi, is a new face. She studies karate, and – if her in-game performance is anything to go by – she's been taking it all in rather well



Tomonubu Itagaki
Team Ninja head

"I am aware that some people talk negatively about the sex appeal, but nobody's perfect"



complete with a paper wall that can be torn through, and, in another, a near-photorealistic beach scene features dozens of gulls swirling through the sky, as Itagaki once again dunks his tormentor in the shallows of the dynamically rendered water.

Improvements all round

Realistic arenas, however, are not enough to make the game truly worthy of hype. After all, how different are *DOA3*'s trees from the statues in *Tekken 4*, or *DOA3*'s leaves from the deformable sand in *Virtua Fighter 4*?

The answer? Not very – but there's so much more of it here. The Xbox hardware has enabled Team Ninja to infuse every element of the game with this same unprecedented level of depth, subtlety and realistic beauty. And nowhere is this more evident than in the fighters themselves.

Take Tina, for example. If you think she looks good now – well, you're right – but you should see her in motion. Her every movement is fluid and lifelike, thanks to painstaking motion capture and the fact that the team actually studies the martial arts techniques each fighter uses – occasionally sporting the bruises to prove it. On top of that, her hair and costume sway and wave realistically as she moves, thanks to sophisticated cloth and hair models. Incredibly, Itagaki apologises for the model's incomplete appearance – in the final build, even the individual muscle groups will animate, so Tina's leg will change shape slightly as she throws a kick, and her arm will flex as she punches. And yes, the ladies, including newcomers Hitomi (a brunette who favors a traditional gi) and Christie (the white-haired lass often seen in a low-cut bodysuit) are more beautiful than ever. While at least one new male character has been added – Brad Wong, apparently the game's drunken master – Itagaki freely admits his fondness for the female form.

"I am aware that some people talk negatively about the sex appeal," he concedes, adding with a smile, "but nobody's perfect."

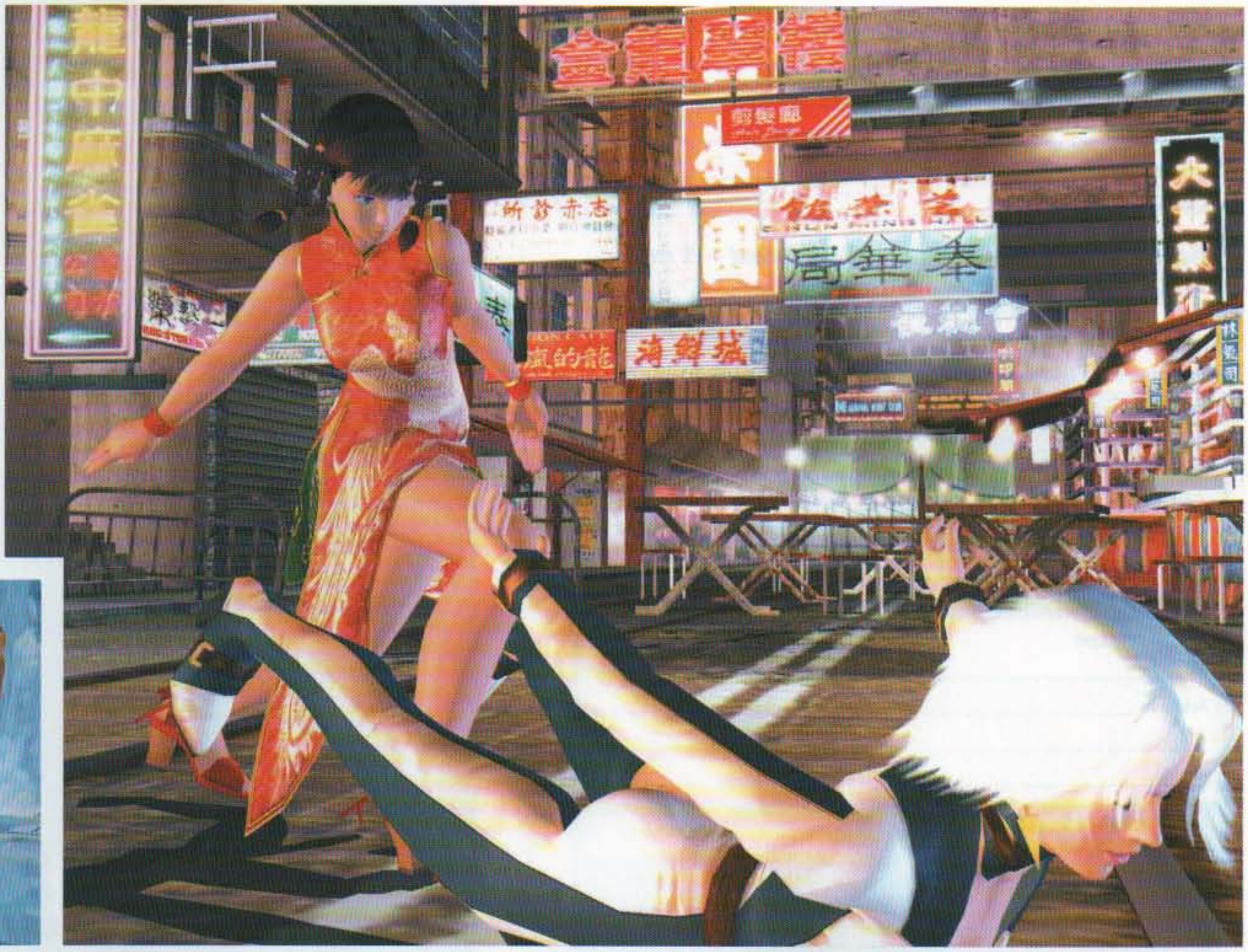
Simply put, this is an incredible,





Although it may well rank as one of the prettiest combat games ever made, *Dead Or Alive 3* features its fair share of dirty fighting, which is heartening to see

You may well be wondering why these screenshots only contain female fighters and surmise that **Edge** has gone all sweaty at the prospect of grappling girls. However, the truth of the matter is that the male characters have yet to be added – and whether they measure up to these figures remains to be seen

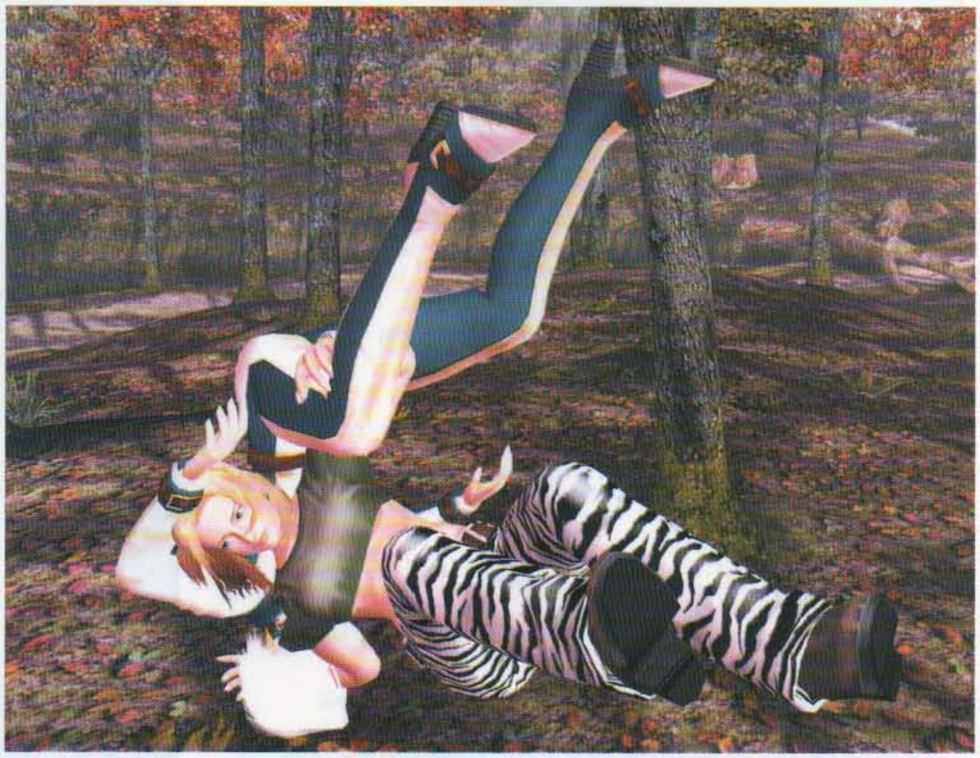


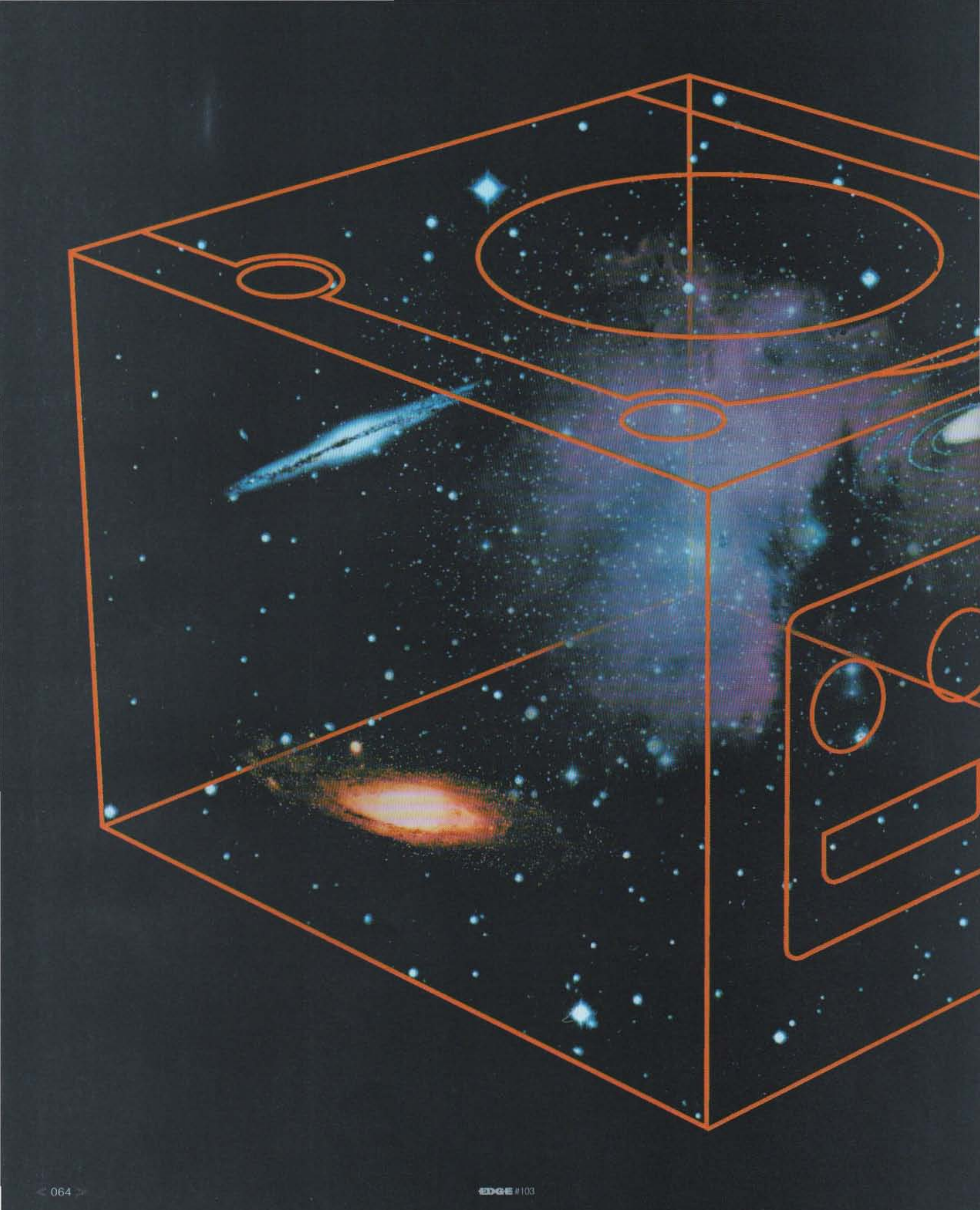


elegant game that couldn't be conceived on any other home system. Certainly not on PlayStation2, whose limitations will already force sacrifices to be made in the home versions of *Tekken 4* and *Virtua Fighter 4*. Nor, it seems, even on GameCube, which (rumour has it) will be graced with *Soul Calibur 2*. Complementing Xbox is Itagaki himself, an exceptional designer with a talented team and a strong vision.

Xbox's killer app

"*Dead Or Alive 2* was the best overall in the fighting game genre," he asserts. "In all specs, like graphics, like fighting features, in characters, in graphics, in sounds, and in fun, it was the top. We will do the same with *Dead Or Alive 3*." A bold statement, to be sure. But it is an amazing game, and **Edge** can't find any reason not to believe him. Fence sitters, take note: Xbox has its first undeniable, unquestionable killer app.







Nintendo Spaceworld: 2001

Hardware revealed, the Big N had to rely on its software to generate the attention this year. It did, but not for all the right reasons. Cartoon Link? Low-profile Mario? What's going on?

If the whoops and hollers of American journalists are anything to go by, then the opening press conference at Spaceworld 2001 was a disaster. Held at Tokyo Big Sight on August 23, the pre-show buzz centred on the unveiling of Mario and Link. But in contrast to last year's revelation of GameCube and Game Boy Advance the short video of *Mario Sunshine* and the latest *Legend Of Zelda* title evinced little more than murmurs of approval from the gathered press.

"Are you ready?" teased **Shigeru Miyamoto** before firing up his video. "But I'd like to ask you a favour – this is confidential and we don't want any photographs taken of what comes next." The audience laughed. But this was no joke. Miyamoto-san repeated his request for cameras to be lowered before the films were run. Though the brief footage of Mario – seen double-leaping from wall to wall in a vibrant village – provoked muted cheers, it was too little to satiate the press. The addition of a device strapped to Mario's back was intriguing, but there was too little to really satisfy. And then came the shock of Link. Accompanied by the familiar *Legend Of Zelda* music, the new look hero – complete with cel-shaded polys and a stylisation harking back to '50s Disney – initially stunned attendees. A few half-hearted cheers went up, but the usually boisterous US correspondents looked on bemused.

"I started to feel strange making Link like an adult," commented Miyamoto-san later. "Link was growing up and I wanted to return him to a childlike state." Certainly, the footage raised many questions – which Link's creator would not be pressed on. The final scene showed Link escaping his enemies, leaping across a pit and dangling precariously by one hand from the opposite side. It was a dramatic introduction to Miyamoto's new vision, but in reality the swooping camera angles only demonstrated an audience-pleasing cut-scene.

"Well, I hope you enjoyed those. Now there is a chance to play our other GameCube titles." It wasn't enough. What had happened? Was Miyamoto-san actively teasing the press? Why the Nintendo diffidence?

But Spaceworld has always been more of a marathon than a sprint. And over the weekend of August 25-





1. GameCube will launch in purple only – orange and black will follow soon afterwards 2. The neat GameCube packaging, which is smaller in size than Xbox 3. Nintendo's SD memory card offering 64Mb of storage 4. The Wave Bird wireless controller has no definite release date 5. Mario's short outing was too little to satiate the world's press











26 the Kyoto toy company let its games do the talking. If the press was initially disappointed by the dearth of announcements, those who really count – the families of Tokyo – were suitably thrilled by the opportunity to play on GameCube for the first time, at which point the Nintendo Difference became apparent. With *Super Monkey Ball*, *Luigi's Mansion* and *Wave Race: Blue Storm* 100 per cent complete, there was little need for vague announcements of future titles. GameCube had arrived and not even EA's *FIFA 2002: Road To FIFA World Cup* could spoil the party.

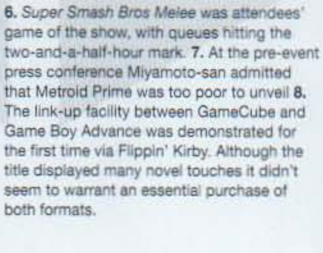
On the show floor

If a game's quality can be judged by popularity alone, then *Super Smash Bros Melee* was the undisputed game of the show. When the doors of the Makuhari Messe opened to the public at 9am on Saturday August 25, streams of Tokyo's youth headed directly for this most instant of GameCube titles. Attracting Pikachu-costumed teenagers and girls adorned with fox tails, the update of the popular N64 beat 'em up sent queue times up to the two-and-a-half-hour mark. It looked like *Luigi's Mansion* would be overlooked as throngs clamoured to take part in organised *Smash Bros Melee* competitions, but interest soon included the plumber. *Smash Bros'* quality was undeniable, with punches and kicks responding to minute pressures exerted on the controller analogue buttons, the game now enables players to whittle down their opponent's energy with quick combos, or overwhelm them with one powerhouse punch. The title is as frantic as the N64 version, but an excellent new oneplayer adventure element enables gamers to challenge the full range of Nintendo characters in a series of elaborate encounters.

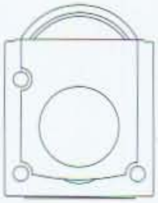
If a game's quality can be judged on popularity alone, then *Super Smash Bros Melee* was the undisputed game of the show… queue times went up to the two-and-a-half-hour mark

Nearby, *Pikmin*'s vibrant colours and innocent style was also attracting healthy numbers. Far more polished than at E3, the object of *Pikmin* became clear. With the GameCube controller melting into the hands, the beauty of the title shone through. Less a resource-management game and more akin to *Lemmings*, the title asks players to pluck the eponymous creatures from their planet surface to help recover parts of a crashed spaceship. Beginning with simple tasks such as cutting down plants for food, the game eventually opens out beyond the landing site to the hazardous world beyond. Bridges can be built by literally throwing Pikmin at the problem, while heavy objects are shifted by assigning a number of your cooperative companions to the task. A target recticle aims the Pikmin, while the A button fires them in the desired direction. An initially baffling game soon became incredibly intuitive. As night falls, the Pikmin beg for their bedtime – which provided the perfect opportunity to pass the controller on.

While queues at *Super Monkey Ball*, *Luigi's Mansion* and *Wave Race: Blue Storm* began to reach saturation point, footsore attendees took the opportunity to try some of the less







6. *Super Smash Bros Melee* was attendees' game of the show, with queues hitting the two-and-a-half-hour mark 7. At the pre-event press conference Miyamoto-san admitted that Metroid Prime was too poor to unveil 8. The link-up facility between GameCube and Game Boy Advance was demonstrated for the first time via Flippin' Kirby. Although the title displayed many novel touches it didn't seem to warrant an essential purchase of both formats.

















09. Link's new cel-shaded appearance generated mixed reactions from the press. The American's didn't like it. Everyone else did. At least the familiar *Legend Of Zelda* music and sound effects were something of a comfort blanket for those expecting detailed textures and millions of polygons **10.** *Eternal Darkness* was less impressive, showing signs of clumsy combat **11.** *Animal Forest+* was a big hit with Tokyo's public – especially after the in-game Family Computer was discovered **12.** *Rune* proved to be the sleeper-hit of the show. While it's only 30 per cent complete, the RPG mechanics mixed with card combat could become a potent cocktail **13.** The Makuhari Messe hall is not the most dynamic venue but served Nintendo well **14.** Yuji Naka and Toshihiro Nagoshi – finding time to discuss potential GameCube titles? **15.** A few Japanese beauties were on hand to add a touch of glamour





























1. *Pikmin* was a popular performer at the show, once the controls had been mastered **2.** *SSX Tricky* failed to distinguish itself enough from the PS2 version **3.** Sadly, *Soul Calibur 2* was video footage only **4.** *Metroid Prime* had moved on from a couple of renders to an eight-second clip **5.** *Star Fox Adventure* lacked immediacy but hinted at great depth **6.** Queues remained tightly packed at the GameCube area until the final few minutes of the show

front-line titles. *Eternal Darkness* – though displaying wonderful architecture and lighting effects – failed to fully convince. At 70 per cent complete the title was showing clumsy combat routines and serious clipping problems. But even less impressive was its insistence on traditional corridor wandering interspersed with occasional switch puzzles.

SSX Tricky failed to capture imaginations by diverting little from the original PS2 version, while *Rune*'s combination of card battle mechanics and RPG elements promised a great deal on an early build. *Star Fox Adventure* vexed as many as it wooed, as with little indication of goals or motivation few returned for seconds. But those who persisted discovered a game which hinted at great depth. A staff with multiple powers, the ability to command creatures and the stunning space combat component certainly augurs well for a title on 60 per cent.

Meanwhile strange things were afoot at the *Animal Forest+* pods. Across one monitor NES classic, *Mike Tyson's Punch Out!!* flickered into view. And then the bug spread. *Punch Out!!* and another NES classic, *Baseball*, disseminated across the majority of *Animal Forest+* screens. Among the 485 MHz, IBM powered Gekko GameCubes, 8bit titles ruled. Though Nintendo representatives must have been overjoyed that players had discovered the joys of the Family Computer in the update of *Animal Forest*, they seemed uncomfortable that so many were trying to take out Glass Joe for so long, and the next batch of players were quickly moved in.

On Saturday, Yuji Naka's *Sonic Adventure 2*.

Lamentable in its absence was *Metroid Prime*. Rumours coming out of Retro studios of development hell were backed up by Miyamoto, who earlier admitted he had code in his bag but that it was too deficient to display. "We were going to show *Metroid Prime* at Spaceworld," he acknowledged. "But discovering no sound and poor control just a few days ago made me decide not to present it." This surely

"We were going to show *Metroid Prime* at Spaceworld," said Miyamoto. "But discovering no sounds and poor control just a few days ago made me decide not to present it"

appearance on the show floor revitalised flagging spirits and sore feet. Attendees recognising the Team Sonic group head attached themselves to his entourage. Echoing scenes from *Pikmin*, Naka-san found movement through the eddy and flow of the Makuhari Messe crowd increasingly demanding. Yet his presence certainly made up for the disappointment of discovering that Team Sonic's new GameCube title (pixellated on its home page) was merely a conversion of

came as a blow for the Retro team, which has come under mounting pressure of late due to a lack of playable code. But turkey of the show still went to *FIFA 2002: Road To FIFA World Cup*. With its simulation of players running through treacle and motion-capture routines mimicking early Marcel Marceau performances, its rough state smacked of rampant desperation. Nintendo's determined effort to highlight their important relationship with EA impressed few.











7. Though the Game Boy Advance area was less populated, titles such as *Super Mario Advance 2* and *Sonic Advance* drew in healthy numbers **8.** *Gradius Generations* also proved hugely popular over at the Konami stand **9.** *Columns Crown* and fourplayer *Puyo Puyo Advance* kept puzzle gamers enthralled for their two-minute sessions **10.** *Street Fighter 3 Zero* came out on top in the beat 'em up competition **11.** *Sabre Wulf* was not to Japanese gaming palates **12.** *Diddy Kong Pilot* was novel but immensely frustrating







Game Boy Advance

While most GameCube titles had Tokyo's residents in raptures, the breadth and depth of Game Boy Advance software was also proving a huge draw. *Super Mario Advance 2* had parents seething with impatience as their offspring quietly lined up for nearly two hours for a three-minute session. For all its modern compactness, the update of *Super Mario World* was playing beautifully, and seems sure to join *Mario Kart Advance* as one of the format's first wave of killer apps. While not such a kiddy-pleaser, *Gradius Generations* was the otaku gamer's title of choice. With competitive instincts clearly getting the better of some (Nintendo staff had trouble wrenching even the politest Japanese gamer away from the second level boss encounter), the excellent pyrotechnics and classic Konami power-up system offered gamers the opportunity to show-off their bullet-dodging prowess.

Elsewhere, Rare's GBA games were faring less well. Although *Diddy Kong Pilot* was drawing in decent numbers, the game's implementation of Nintendo's tilt technology – first used in *Kirby Tilt 'N' Tumble* – was proving awkward. Though lighting was adequate for static GBA play, the movement necessary to steer Diddy Kong through checkpoints left players staring into their own reflection at crucial moments.

Sabre Wulf was also suffering some ignominy. UK journalists present on the public days were given ample opportunity to sample the game's fine puzzle mechanics and old-skool arcade adventuring. But the game's distinct brand of British humour – complete with tea drinking cut-scenes and Union Jack waving – was not to Japanese tastes. Indeed, the sight of Nintendo representatives trying to usher gamers through the empty chain-link queue cordons was heartbreaking.

Puzzle game fans were well catered for by the number of titles featuring coloured blocks and appealing sound effects. Sega's *Puyo Puyo Advance* and *Columns Crown* were best of breed and effortlessly updated their addictive formulae to GBA. Beat 'em ups, too, were prevalent with *Guilty Gear X*, *Tekken 3* and *Street Fighter 3 Zero* going head-to-head for public attention. *Street Fighter* edged a win with the crispest collision detection and most dynamic sprite movement, though *Guilty Gear X* came in a close second. Though no wooden spoon contender, *Tekken* looked slightly pixellated by comparison but impressed in other departments. It's clever implementation of a rotation command gave the game a pseudo 3D aspect and allowed players to avoid and circle opponents deftly.

Consoles combined

While GameCube and Game Boy Advance were separated by a few feet on the show floor, Nintendo had hoped Spaceworld would be its first convincing argument for combining the two systems together for additional gameplay opportunities. Although *Flippin' Kirby*'s connectivity to GBA demonstrated intriguing gameplay innovations, it smacked of novelty rather than a compelling reason to purchase both systems. By using motion-sensor technology the GBA can be manipulated to control GameCube Kirby's movement. Rolling into tubes and holes relegates Kirby to the confines of the GBA screen until an exit is discovered. Generators spawning multiple Kirbys added to the crossplatform complexity, but the title still needed work. Although plans for sport roster sheets, radar scopes and the swapping of collectables have been mooted, the GBA's limited digital input would seem to constrain advancements in this area.

Nintendo had hoped Spaceworld would be its first convincing argument for combining the two systems. However, the GBA's limited digital input would seem to constrain advancements in this area

Though the absence of *Rogue Leader: Rogue Squadron II*, *Metroid Prime* and *Soul Calibur 2* were profound disappointments to industry insiders, it was clear that Spaceworld 2001 was a tremendous success for the public. It was with tired eyes and weary feet that visitors dispersed from the Makuhari Messe hall. Clutching numerous brochures, themed hand-fans and *Pokémon* merchandise, the Nintendo faithful went away buoyed by their encounters with Luigi, Sonic, Pikachu, Mario and Fox McCloud. That queues were little depleted moments before the show ended was testament to the quality of Nintendo's first full wave of GameCube and Game Boy Advance software. And that's no mean feat for a venue with all the character of a disused hangar.

Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge's** rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Broadly speaking, scores correspond to the following sentiments: one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

Videogames on the Edge

This month's unanimous choices...

Onimusha

Breaking seals, solving puzzles and slicing enemies in half. Typical Capcom fare, then. But *Onimusha* just does everything with a touch of amazing elegance.



(PS2) Capcom

Samba De Amigo

Edge just keeps on rocking to 'Take On Me' and 'Tub Thumping', maracas waving, laying waste to lamp shades and any other breakable furniture in the area.



(DC) Sega

3DO Need For Speed

Graphics and framerate aside, this has lost nothing since its arrival in 1995. It's still supremely playable. And it's still better than the majority of today's racers.



(3DO) EA

Burnout

'Early review code' turns up in the office. **Edge** decides to wait for the finished article. But that doesn't necessarily mean it can't be played. A lot.



(PS2) Acclaim

Small is beautiful

The unbridled joy of a hardware launch

Wow, it's small. Really, really small. And that's just the box – the Cube itself is even smaller. So small. So shiny. So purple. So small.

The arrival of a new console is, of course, exciting, even to the point that stray exclamation marks make it into **Edge**'s copy. Nintendo's new machine is no exception. Crowds gather; every piece of packaging is examined; someone asks to look at the FedEx receipt; someone else wants to hold the composite out cable. When **Edge** actually gets around to plugging the machine in, the low hum of the internal fan is enough to send the room into raptures.

So, those initial impressions. The CDs are tiny. The pad melts. There are no loading times. Well, there are five-second pre-race pauses on *Wave Race*, but coming off the back of a game like *Thunderhawk*, where the player must progress through five memory-eating menus to get close to interaction, it feels like a migraine's lifted.

If large loading times are a signature problem of the PS2, then it looks like **Edge** may spend a reasonable part of the next few months staring at splash screens. The list of games scheduled to hit Sony's machine before the GameCube arrives here is formidable, both in sheer number and conceivable quality. This month, *Silent Hill 2* and *Devil May Cry* both spark brilliance, but it's unfortunate for them that they've arrived in a month where the GameCube's proved such a worthy distraction. It's been a stunning few weeks, with one day standing out in particular.

The best moment of it comes later in the afternoon. *Super Monkey Ball*, for whatever reason, has been delayed, and arrives sometime after the long-lingering crowd has drifted away. The extra pads arrive at the same time, too, and **Edge** quietly plugs them in and embarks on its first Sega/Nintendo console experience. It takes seconds for the shrieking to begin, and the grinning and growling and yelling, and soon the games room is full of onlookers again, passing pads around and marvelling at how, suddenly, gaming seems exactly like it was ten years ago: quick, fast, simple, and fun.

And, in a couple of months, **Edge** gets to do it all over again with the Xbox. Nintendo has set the standard, and while Microsoft's machine has much to prove, it has ample resources to prove it with. It'll certainly be interesting, and, hopefully, it'll be just as exciting. However, it probably won't be as small.





074



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086



089

Super Monkey Ball

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **Amusement Vision** Price: **¥5,800 (£34)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**



Complete the first set of levels under certain conditions, and extra beginner levels make themselves available. This maze takes place on a tilting circular mirror with the AV logo cut out of the centre



Without a jump button, intrepid sphere-caged monkeys must rely on moving platforms to traverse gaps. Getting from one side of the arena to the other is simple, getting all the bananas somewhat less so





The mini-games are far from insubstantial, and Edge is now well practiced in the art of monkey bowling. Challenge mode sets you patterns of split pins to knock down

While it's frustrating when you fall the first time, by the 13th or 14th, it's sickening – like when you know failure's inevitable, similar to the sinking feeling you get when a rollercoaster drops and leaves your stomach behind. But if you succeed on the 15th try…

This is simple. There is a ball with a monkey in, and there is a goal, and there is a way of reaching that goal that will, at times, come close to breaking you. The control stick tilts the maze, and the ball rolls around, and the ball falls off the maze, and you lose a life. There are no tricks in *Super Monkey Ball*.

Here's the thing, though: levels that will initially cost you life after life and continue upon continue – levels that initially seemed impossible – will eventually succumb, and become easier and easier on each roll through. It's partly because the depth of control you have over the sphere increases, but it's also partly psychological. Once a level falls, the mysticism around it vanishes. It's beatable; it's an afterthought on the route to your next impossible hurdle.

And then the challenge becomes finishing the course perfectly, or finding the hidden warp gates, or getting all the collectable bananas, or shaving off hundredths of seconds en route to the paper finishing tape. The game absorbs the player, and to that end the GameCube pad suits *Super Monkey Ball* perfectly. It sits in your hand unnoticed, the analogue stick is perfect, and, thanks to the reductive control system, that's all that matters. More specifically, the octagonal ridge around the socket allows confident players to lock the ball's path into an obscenely fast straight line, critical for some of the tightly timed Expert courses. As the difficulty increases, parallels are drawn with fairground wire loop puzzles. Tension, fear and air-punching reward increase proportionally.

Completing a maze in oneplayer unlocks it for multiplayer, and here *Super Monkey Ball* also excels. As well as the main event, which sees players engage in a straight race through each course, there are three immediately available party games: Monkey Race (monkeys race around circuits; see boxout); Monkey Target (monkeys glide, *PilotWings* style, through rings and towards points-scoring targets); and *Monkey Fight* (monkeys use boxing gloves to knock each other from floating platforms). There are also three locked mini-games, purchased with points won in the oneplayer experience: Monkey Golf, Monkey Billiards and Monkey Bowling. All have oneplayer, multiplayer, and challenge modes, and none are half-assed throwaway rewards. Even the high score table and finishing sequences are playable. You're always involved. You're always rolling.

The game's beautiful, too, if that counts for anything. Every surface is bright and solid and shiny, every aspect impeccably presented. The hundred worlds are smooth and tactile, carved from the same magical pseudo-raytraced stuff as *Sonic*'s Green Hill

Levels that will initially cost you life after life and continue upon continue – levels that initially seemed impossible – will eventually succumb



















Zone and described by perfect arcs.

But, at least to an extent, the imagery's irrelevant. *Super Monkey Ball* is defined by the emotions that surround every player in every game, emotions as unrefined and angular as the mazes aren't. Every second brings another jagged spike of highrise elation or freefall despair, and that's what makes the game so superb.

So it's simple, unassuming, and it demands persistence. And at times it's frustrating and sickeningly difficult, but when you finally beat a maze on your 15th try, on the last life of your last continue, it's all worth it. If that experience could be distilled into a single word, it would be euphoria; reducing *Super Monkey Ball* to one word is simpler. It's genius.

Edge rating: Nine out of ten

Reminiscent of Nintendo's Game Boy tilt title *Koro Koro Kirby*, the angle of the board here controls not only the ball but also the sliding 'stop' barriers, which leads to some frantic tilting



Chimp challenge

Monkey Race gives the player the chance to speed their simian around over six circuit-based courses, rolling over speed boosts and firing some fantastic power-ups at opponents. One attacking weapon turns an opponent's sphere into something akin to a dodecahedron, which rolls around uncomfortably. Another transforms it into a cube, which just slides helplessly along under the player's momentum. Like all the games, the other players can be human or AI monkey bots, but the experience is at its best in four player: chaotic, boastful, painful, and superbly entertaining.

Luigi's Mansion

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£39)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**

Back in 1984 Nintendo launched the Family Computer. The intention was to bring parents and children together with accessible games for all the family. There was a certain amount of propaganda involved in this, of course, but the sentiment held true for many titles. But Nintendo's talk of returning to such a 'golden age' with the GameCube is resolutely endorsed by its launch titles. *Luigi's Mansion*, in particular, screams accessibility, but more importantly, offers depth beneath the sumptuous visuals.

It is Nintendo's ability to constantly surprise and reward while maintaining the wonderfully creepy atmosphere that keeps you playing on







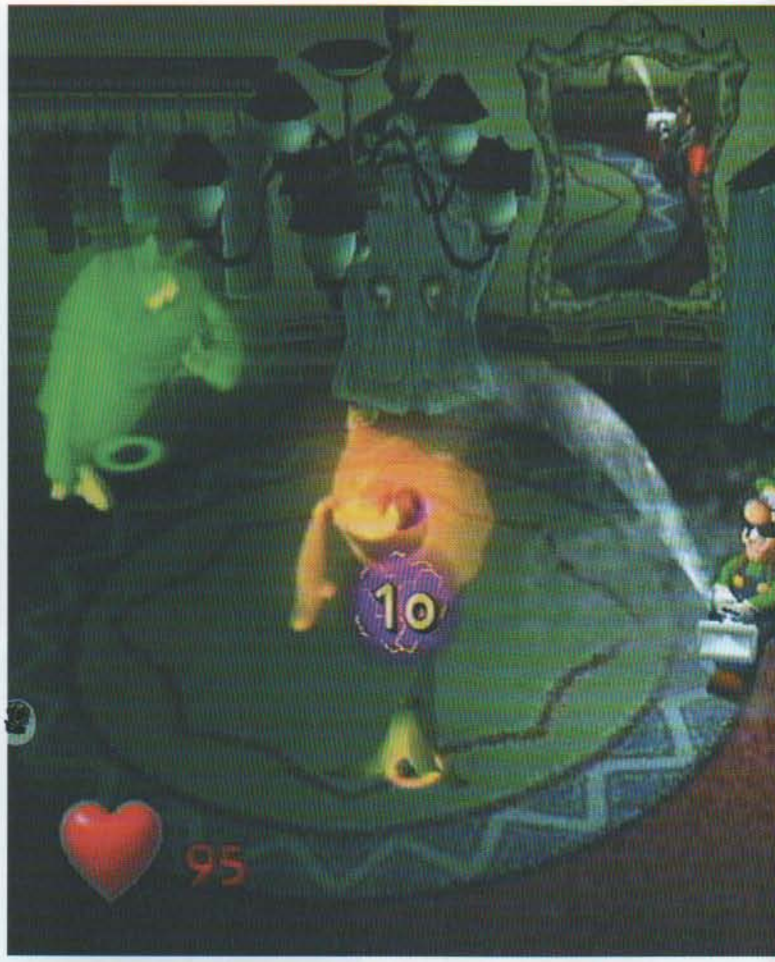


Luigi carries around a special Game Boy Horror electronic device. Not only does it display a map of the whole mansion, but also works as a radar at later stages

Though the game stunned audiences at E3 with its graphical flair, many complained of a shallow game dynamic. Sucking up ghosts was a novel idea, but it soon became repetitive. Fast forward to the present and all that has changed. Luigi's one-dimensional vacuum cleaner has taken on a more menacing sophistication. Ghosts are no longer merely sucked out of the ether, but are reeled in like fish with a heavy rotation of the analogue stick. The torchlight, too, stuns apparitions and provides moments of panic between targeting phantoms with the beam and then turning on the suction to dispatch them. Fill a room with several foes and the action becomes furious, fearful and fun.

During Luigi's mission to rid the mansion of its denizens and find Mario in the process, the full panoply of haunted house rooms must be searched. But in a marvellous example of Nintendo imagination, every room has its own personality, both in terms of object interaction and ghost presence. Enter the nursery and the rocking horse must be disturbed to agitate the sleeping baby. Teddy bears are thrown your way, but rubber balls sucked onto the end of the vacuum's nozzle can be propelled in the tot's direction – providing an opportunity to draw the nipper in for final elimination. It would be cruel to spoil such moments by revealing the many ways in which the spectres can be caught, but the creativity and ingenuity is staggering.

Add to this the enhancements Luigi receives to his vacuum and the gameplay opportunities only increase. Suck in miniature fire, ice or water elementals and the vacuum can be put into reverse, blowing the gas or liquid and effectively providing a new way to approach the game and trigger events. There are many secret doors and entrances to discover, too. Indeed, all the room furniture must be examined to reveal hidden bonuses and mysteries. Mirrors don't just act as impressive visuals, but highlight ghostly presences, reveal hidden switches and even work as transporters to the lobby area. The attention to detail has also been lavished on the sound. Luigi's progress through the house is accompanied by his own nervous humming of the theme tune, but all the expected creaking, weather effects and spectral groans and sighs are expertly done.



Ghosts are reeled in by performing a circular motion on the left analogue stick. Each has a meter which runs down after some frantic manipulation, though banana skins and other enemies hamper poor Luigi

Churls might moan about some of the well-worn motifs in the game. Collecting hearts for energy and keys from chests for doors are hackneyed, but they only act as symbols for navigating the game space rather than gameplay elements in themselves. It is Nintendo's ability to constantly surprise and reward while maintaining the wonderfully creepy atmosphere that keeps you playing on. The desire to explore just one more location before switching off never really goes away.

Fears *Luigi's Mansion* was going to have a short lifespan have been put to rest. Though it's no epic, it will take longer than you expect to complete. Thankfully, the number of times that you laugh, flinch, and have your breath taken away are numerous enough to warrant at least another jaunt through the creaky house.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten









Not all the inhabitants of the mansion are there to frighten Luigi out of his senses. Toad appears in some unusual places throughout the game to offer tips and enables you to save your game









Firstperson fear

See the horrors from Luigi's perspective and a number of hidden aspects are revealed. Some of the invisible ghosts shimmer into view, revealing behaviour patterns or clues as to their weakness. Articles of note can also be examined, bringing up text hints. But, most importantly, objects placed on the transparent wall between the player and Luigi can be viewed, thus betraying the location of hidden switches and buttons.

Each of the mansion's inhabitants must be captured in a slightly different manner. This bookish spectre (above) only becomes vulnerable when he issues a protracted yawn. Then the vacuum action begins





The lighting effects are tremendous. But, like all aspects of this polished title, they are not just included for graphics junkies. Torchlight stuns enemies while lightning effects from outside reveal lurking phantoms

Wave Race: Blue Storm

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **In-house (NST)** Price: **¥6,800 (£39)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**









Bad weather comes rolling in during the Aspen Lake race. By the end of the course, visibility is severely reduced

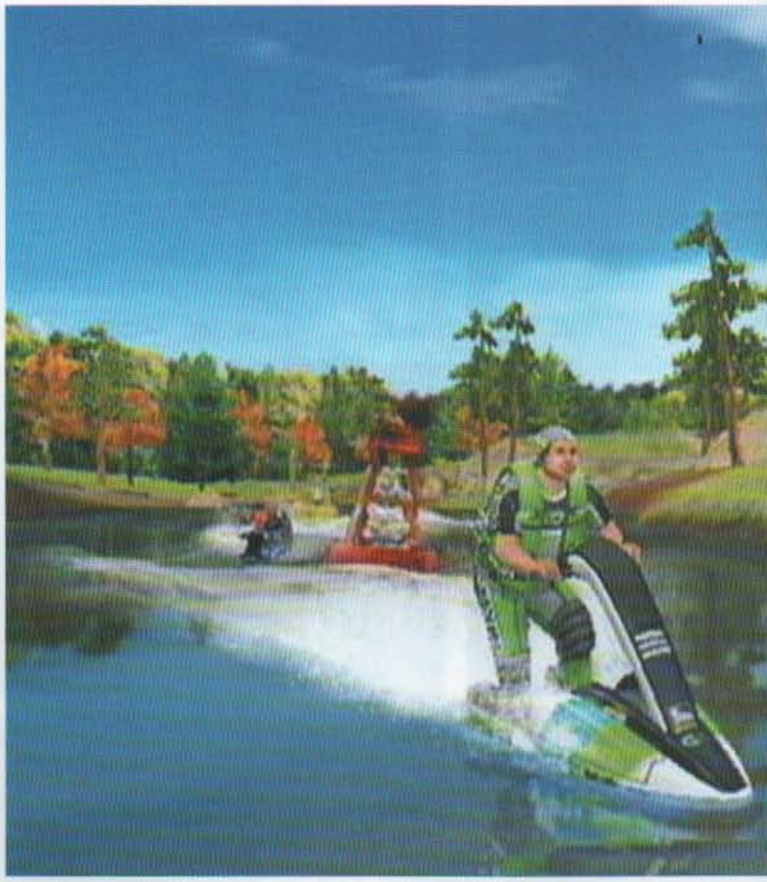
The original incarnation of *Wave Race* was an important product for the N64: not only did it show off the wonder of the analogue controller, but was acclaimed for the incredible authenticity of its water-based visuals. In fact, the game's graphical accomplishments would not be bettered by any other machine, console or coin-op, for years. Nothing on the PlayStation, PC or Dreamcast came even close, and it's taken a 128-bit sequel to fully reprise the title – a major testament to the original effort by Nintendo's in-house developers.

Wave Race lives and dies on its representation of jetski physics, and in this measure, *Blue Storm* is equally as successful as its inspiration. Your jetski responds not only to left/right movement of the analogue stick, but also to up/down; pulling back shifts the weight of the rider and digs the rear of the 'ski into the water, enabling you to turn almost on a sixpence. Similarly, the analogue L and R shoulder pads are used to progressively bank the machine, improving its turning circle accordingly. This mechanism is simple yet effective: steering is intuitive and within minutes becomes second nature, though mastering it thoroughly takes time.

Eye of the storm

Having provided this degree of control, the game then urges you to make the most of it with its twisting, slalom-style courses. The aim is to negotiate each course, threading between the red and yellow 'booeys', as the commentators insist on calling them. As each buoy is passed successfully, so the turbo gradually charges up, ready for you to engage a burst of forward thrust; miss a buoy and your turbo meter is wiped clean, and a small power-down incurred. (More annoying, though, is the terse ticking-off meted out by the disembodied voice – take our word for it Nintendo, it doesn't make you play any better.) Miss five buoys in a race and you're retired from proceedings.

The game retains the same championship structure of the first, with certain courses and events locked off until you place highly enough in the preceding races. Thus, once you've completed four



If nothing else, *Wave Race: Blue Storm* features truly astonishing graphics. The water features proper Fresnel reflections, whereby the surface becomes less reflective as the camera incidence angle increases

of the first tracks, the fifth and final course becomes available. Then, as long as you place in the top three in the whole event, the next, longer, championship is unlocked.

Progress in oneplayer mode is hard-won; having opened the second championship within minutes, the game suddenly raises the bar somewhat. Like the original, it feels as if the lack of competitive events – there are just three championships – is countered by a frightening difficulty curve. Also, the opposition's AI is overly harsh, so no matter how flawless your performance, there's always a competitor breathing down your neck. As such, this is not a game for the faint-hearted; the challenge is daunting and the path often infuriating.

Indeed, longevity is a worry. Further options include an entertaining four-way multiplayer mode; a Stunt mode allowing you to rack up high scores; and a Time Trial – complete with bizarre helicopter 'ghost' – that lets you chase low times. But these are all played out on the same tracks, and, barring any unexpected bonuses, there are just eight in all (assuming you're able to unlock the later ones, of course).

Fortunately, the addition of variable weather conditions alters both the look and feel of each course. Without doubt this is the wettest game **Edge** has ever played. Prime candidate for this is Aspen Lake in the rain: not only is it pouring down, but the skies grow greyer and greyer during the course of the race, until by the end you're feeling thoroughly cold and damp.

You can even immerse yourself to a greater extent, by connecting the system to a Dolby Surround decoder, whereupon the 3D soundfield provides cues as to the location of other players and noisy features like waterfalls. Indeed the quality of the

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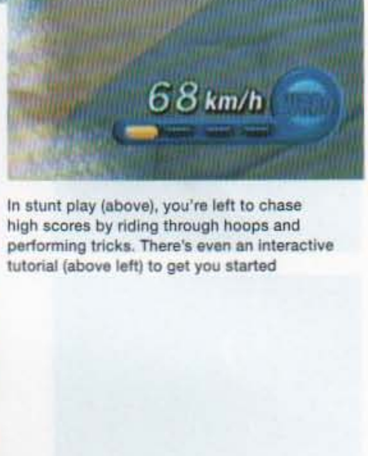






Unlike *Super Money Ball*, the threeplayer game doesn't favour one with a larger slice of the action







In stunt play (above), you're left to chase high scores by riding through hoops and performing tricks. There's even an interactive tutorial (above left) to get you started

sound throughout is very high.

As you'll have no doubt gathered, *Wave Race: Blue Storm* will be immediately familiar to anyone who lavished time on its predecessor. In fact the similarities between the two versions are perhaps just a little too close for comfort: the control, the structure, the jetski physics, the grating voiceovers and even the design of the courses, makes *Wave Race: Blue Storm* little more than a slickly refurbished, high-resolution incarnation of the original.

Sadly this reduces its overall impact: *Wave Race 64* brokered an entirely new concept within the racing genre, but all *Blue Storm* does is refine it and wrap it in a new – albeit beautiful and sophisticated – package. We're talking Special Edition, here, rather than Director's Cut.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten









Where the N64 incarnation could only draw four jetskiers at a time, *Blue Storm* (above) features eight – all of which are customisable to suit. The sumptuous intro sequence (left) is just plain showing off...



Present and correct

The presentation of *Wave Race* is nothing short of sublime. From the animated loading screens (where you can idly interact with the watery backdrop) to the inbuilt tutorial to the animated character select screens, the game just drips of quality – and of completeness. Like all of Nintendo's products, *Blue Storm* is clearly finished and honed. No patches needed here...

Devil May Cry

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£39)** Release: **Out now (Japan) Q4 (UK)**

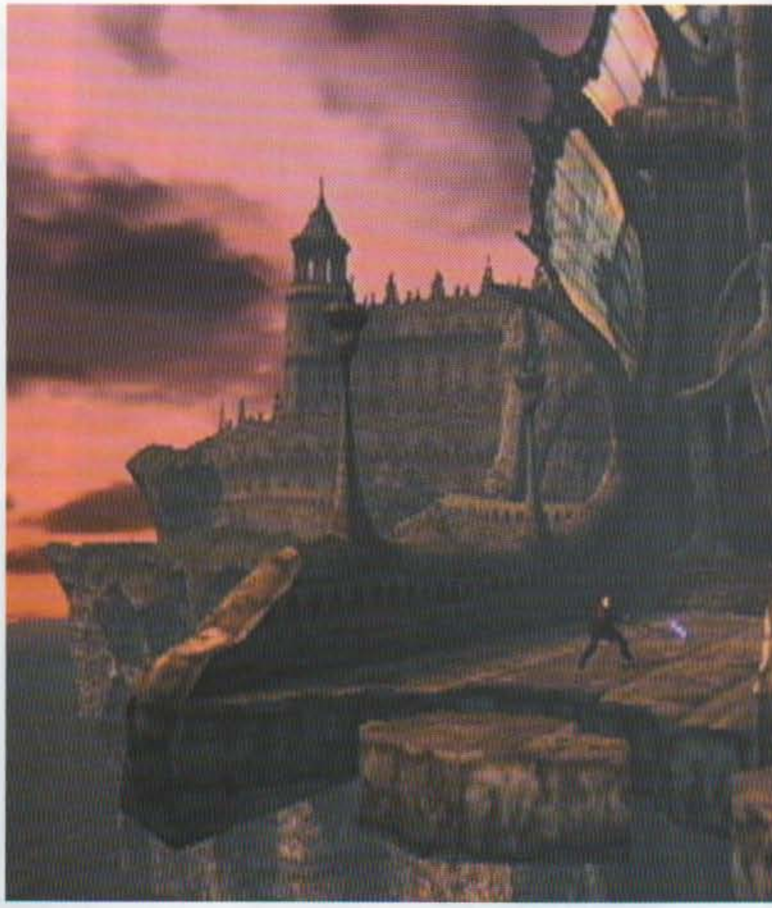








Dante's opponents are a varied bunch but most fit in perfectly with the game's visual character. Annoyingly, though, there's an overuse of the same bosses throughout



Devil May Cry's initial moments lure you into a false sense of security. You'll think it familiar territory: the *Biohazard*-esque cut-scene acting, dramatic camera angles, similarly accomplished atmospheric accompanying score and wandering from room to room in a seemingly deserted and suitably sinister locale.

Naturally, things get a little more crowded once Lucifer's minions begin their campaign against Dante, your devil-slaying character intent on avenging murdered family members. While the stilted Capcom narrative is unlikely to inspire, when combined with the tremendous mood achieved by the superbly detailed, overwhelming Gothic environments, the package becomes wonderfully engaging. Furthermore, *Devil May Cry* soon reveals itself to be a significantly different proposition to the serial zombiefest we've come to expect from its survival horror specialist developer.

For a start, the entire game is mission based. Rather than break up the flow of the action, in practice this structure works surprisingly well, with a satisfying mix of mission complexity and objectives to keep you guessing. While these typically involve A-B movement occasionally interrupted by a boss encounter, the developer keeps interest levels high by introducing unexpected game mechanics right to the bitter end. Some are 'blink and you'll miss them' subtle, while others – such as the firstperson swimming sections – are rather more conspicuous.

Also noticeable is the lack of keys to collect. Sure, there are doors that remain stubbornly shut until a certain action or, indeed, an actual key is found, but these are relatively rare. The incessant retreading of steps so indigenous to survival horrors is thankfully mostly absent. The resulting effect on the game's pace ensures the title remains an action game at all times – evil attacks relentlessly, leaving you little breathing space. The game promotes fast play, evident in the decision to opt for a fully analogue control system, replacing the cumbersome method employed by Capcom's thirdperson adventures to date. Some clever touches designed to smooth out potential navigational wrinkles are also a reassuring indication that thought has gone into manipulation issues.

Devil May Cry is a thoroughly rich blend, it turns out – another excellent adventure from the Osaka-based developer

Of course, that's not to say you can't take your time over most missions if you really want to – in fact, wandering souls are more than likely to stumble across one of the game's 12 secret missions as a result. Just don't expect your sluggish performance to get a superior grade in the post-level assessment screen. Individual mission grades combine once the game is over to give an overall evaluation of your game execution, but, more importantly, they also reward you in-game with bonus orbs. The poorer you do, the fewer orbs you get.

It's a thoroughly rich blend, it turns out – another excellent adventure from the Osaka-based developer. The varied mission elements, engrossing plot, BMG and accomplished visuals combined with the fluidity of the main character's movement, ease of play and dramatic camera work offer a distinguished and highly compelling adventure, not unlike an interactive slice of engaging anime cake, baked John Woo style.

It's not entirely concocted from perfect ingredients, however. During the many boss encounters the camera can at times prove uncooperative and disorientating, which can in turn lead to significant energy losses – frustrating if you're battling one of the harsher enemies. Thankfully, the defect doesn't present itself during the rest of your dealings with the forces of darkness. It's also not the longest title of its type, although – as ever – there are extras to encourage further play.

And, ultimately, anyone unwilling to experience *Devil May Cry* on the erroneous basis that it represents a typical, predictable Capcom enterprise is simply missing out on an enthralling and genuinely distinct adventure.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten











Interestingly, while the environments are fully three-dimensional, the game camera tends to be fixed (the odd occasional pan and zoom is adroitly thrown in for effect). In practice, this tends to work well



Thankfully, weapons don't run out of ammo in *DMC* – another facet promoting flowing gameplay. Played in typical *Biohazard* style, things seem overly difficult. Knowing when to use power-ups becomes key

Red, red whine



Red orbs are not only awarded at the end of every mission – they are also obtained every time you dispose of adversaries (in addition, green 'health' orbs appear regularly). How many you receive from each kill depends on how adventurous you've been in the combo department. Other than just encouraging creative fighting sequences, red orbs play a crucial role in allowing power-ups and new fighting abilities to be 'bought'. It's a dynamic that works well, introducing an (admittedly basic) strategic ingredient into the mix.

Project Eden

Format: **PlayStation2/PC** Publisher: **Eidos Interactive** Developer: **Core Design** Price: **£40** Release: **September 28**







It's the mix of gadgets, skills and some seriously labyrinthine levels that really expands the potential of the find-switch puzzle dynamic far beyond the humdrum

While *Project Eden* isn't the technically proficient tour de force that early code promised, the underlying game mechanics – those of team-based problem solving – are actually very satisfying. Visually, things are more akin to a souped-up PSone title rather than the next, more accomplished, wave of PS2 titles, but despite these rough edges – which extend to the interface – some sensible design and a host of novel ways to interact with the gamespace save the day.

It's impossible not to notice the game's general level of untidiness. The shortcomings of the visual style are ample demonstration of the limits of a 'realistic' aesthetic in the face of hardware constraints. The onscreen interface is far from optimised for a regular TV screen resolution, and the control system is sluggish and can be counterintuitive. The plot is fairly hackneyed, and relayed through less than inspiring cut-scenes accompanied by voice acting that is, at best, amateur.

But, at first glance, the most unsatisfactory element in the mix is the combat. Both enemy and buddy AI is limited, and the auto aim is ungainly and easily confused. The biggest problem, though, is that the team-based puzzle dynamic requires the specific skillset of each team member to be available for the duration of the game. To overcome the problem of premature death curtailing the core component of the game, regeneration and reload points populate every level – bestowing eternal life and rendering combat inconsequential.





***Project Eden*'s derelict surroundings are atmospheric enough, but for the most part are frustratingly empty**

However, little of this matters, because this rudimentary form of combat serves to regulate the pace of the puzzle-solving part of the game. It would have been nice to see more combat-based puzzles, such as the sentry guns that require team members to attack from various sides, but as the game progresses combat hotspots with unending streams of enemies lend some consequence to encounters. In any case, the conundrums that are at the heart of the game are, in general, so well-conceived and challenging that it's easy to forgive any superficial faults.





Combat is woefully reductive and cumbersome, but it does serve to regulate the puzzle dynamic

Visually, things are more akin to a souped-up PSone title rather than the next, more accomplished, wave of PlayStation2 titles



Starting out in the Real Meat Factory, the tone of *Project Eden* starts as it means to go on, with slabs of engineered meat giving way to all manner of cybernetically enhanced, genetically freakish baddies

Granted, the puzzles are little more than the 'find switch' variety, writ large for the benefit of the PlayStation2 generation. But they are so finely crafted, set over some seriously expansive levels, and are so enlivened by a variety of toys and the skills of individual team members that this doesn't really matter. Ranging from the easily solvable to the brain-achingly obtuse, the in-game problems are genuinely satisfying to conquer. The ability to manoeuvre in and observe the gamespace in novel ways – thanks to the Big Trak-like Rover, the Flycam, and the hacking skills of Minoko, who accesses security cameras and even, at one point, a mobile laser platform – enliven the process. As do mini-games such as Andre's repair skill, which consists of a series of reflex tests.

So, as a oneplayer game, *Project Eden* is a much more heartening experience than first glances might suggest, while a co-operative multiplayer mode, with support for four players via splitscreen, compensates for an execrable deathmatch mode. The result is a title that befits its next-gen platform in spite of its unpolished front end, lengthy load times and control issues.

Edge rating: **Seven out of ten**

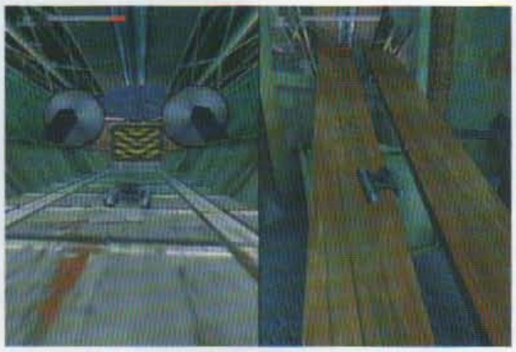


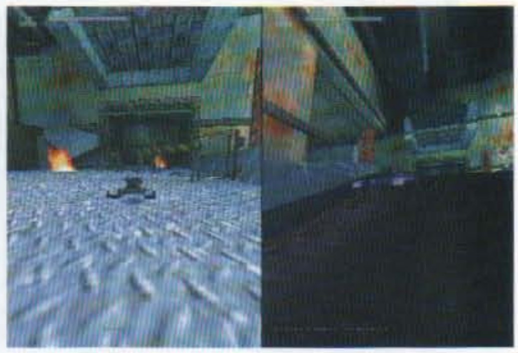




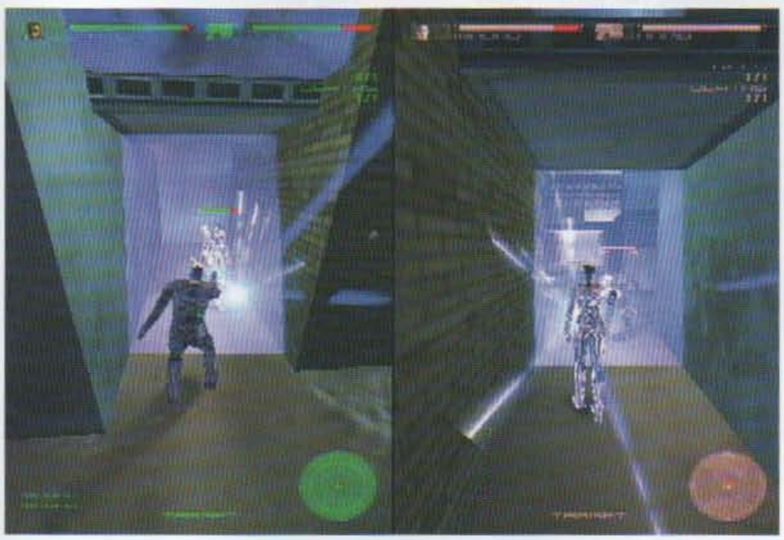








A multiplayer Rover tank race is a nice idea, particularly given the redundancy of deathmatch arenas, but it's badly executed in practice, featuring only one, rather capricious and curiously unengaging, circuit



Although it probably wasn't the developer's intention, deathmatch encounters are frequently hilarious, involving one or more players camping out by a regen point, safely picking off the futile attacks of peers

Dire deathmatch



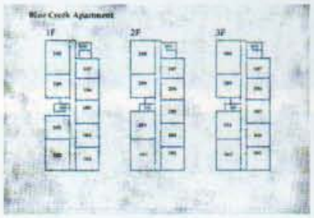
While combat is nearly redundant in oneplayer mode, it's entirely superfluous in deathmatch mode. Had the developer decided not to provide regeneration and reload points in the deathmatch arenas, the clunky control system would still have conspired to produce an average experience. As it is, the lure of eternal life proves too great, resulting in a comic camping epidemic. Likewise, a Rover race mode is a nice idea, but with just one course – which features some inexplicably arbitrary killing grounds – it's not as entertaining as it might have been.

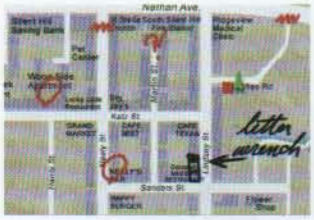
Silent Hill 2

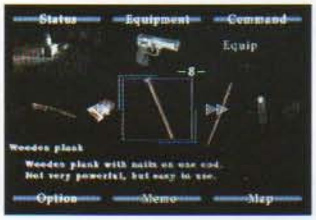
Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Konami** Developer: **Team Silent** Price: **¥6,800 (£39)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**











The player is led from location to location, picking up clues in a roughly linear path. A more open gameplay structure would have been welcomed as a fresh approach to the genre

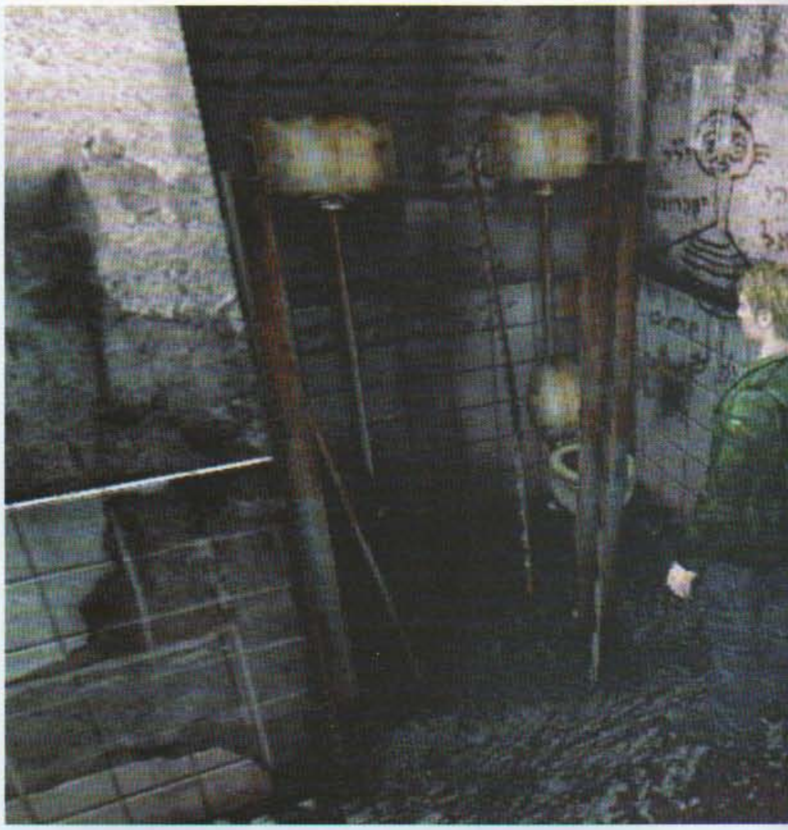
Very rarely do videogames take a cold, sharp scalpel and poke at our primal fears. Not even *Resident Evil* – credited with inventing the survival horror genre – managed or even attempted it: Capcom just wanted to make players jump once in a while as they shot their way through a creaky Romero theme park ride.

Silent Hill was the real deal. Released three years after the original *Resident Evil*, it pitted one man against a town filled with putrid psychological demons. With its unremitting fog, its tormenting audio effects, its emotional cruelty (have you seen a couple of the more bleak endings?), Konami's sick little baby took horror gaming into new, genuinely disturbing directions. It was Nine Inch Nails' 'Downward Spiral' brought painfully to life.

If anything, the sequel spirals further into fear. It's set in the same fog-smothered town, of course, and the story still revolves around one ordinary man's descent into some kind of hell. But *Silent Hill 2* exploits the new visual possibilities of PlayStation2 to make that hell just a little more resonant, more pungent and more immediate. From the collapsing billboards that line the cracked roads, to the mould-streaked walls of the apartment buildings, to the bloody slaughterhouse that is the Silent Hill hospital, each location is a painstakingly detailed snapshot of festering decay. And everywhere you look in those locations, there's a scary image: blood-hued graffiti warning of apocalypse, lab coats smeared with gore, dead bodies sprawled in dead-end alleys. It's every morbid image ever conceived by Marilyn Manson, Clive Barker and David Fincher churned into one.

And, as with all survival horror adventures, the very nature of the gameplay shoves your face right into the scenery. *Silent Hill 2*, like its predecessor, is all about exploring, picking up clues and objects, and following the trail through set-piece locations. Which means you have to explore every fetid corner. Even rooms, buildings and vehicles that contain no obvious clues, might contain ammo or health, and that blank-looking noticeboard in the corner may have a code written on it that unlocks a room later on.

Silent Hill 2, like its predecessor, is all about exploring, picking up clues and objects, and following the trail through set-piece locations



Set design throughout the title shows an intricate attention to detail: rooms are filled with bloodstained objects and clothing, and the resulting atmosphere is extremely effective

Predictably, then, you spend hours looking for stuff, and then you spend hours trying to figure out what to do with the stuff (old coins, pieces or string, rings, etc) that you've found. There are also a couple of great little riddles that will – if you go for anything above Easy mode – require some potent abstract thought. But yes, these are the staples of the genre and they have been for more than five years. You explore, you pick up objects, you open new doors, you fight monsters, you watch animated sequences which slowly unravel the plot. Nevertheless, beneath the twisted visuals this is horror by numbers.

However, if the formulaic gameplay is a slight disappointment, the entirely new story makes up for it. James Sanderland has driven into town to locate his wife, who he thought had died three years ago until she sent him a letter from Silent Hill. When he arrives he finds the place deserted, except for zombie-like creatures lurking in the mist.

Pretty quickly you pick up a plank of wood for a weapon and a radio which acts as a kind of monster detector, emitting static every time an undead attacker gets close. Then you're own your own, unravelling the weird history of the town and learning about some strange disease at the local hospital, and bashing the creatures lurking in each room, street and corridor. All the while, somewhere out there, James's spouse is waiting.

Occasionally, another character turns up. A twitchy ex-con named Eddie, an elusive girl named Laura and – strangest of all – Maria, the girl who looks exactly like your wife. They all mutter nonsense clues about what's happened at Silent Hill and where your wife may be – opening up sub-plots and twists you fear will never be tied up, like an over-ambitious episode of 'The X-Files'. But, ultimately, the narrative proves intriguing, and a couple of hours play easily turn into a whole night as you desperately track down that vital piece of a growing enigma.











Although the monsters are well-designed and undeniably disturbing, there is a lack of variety. And although the emphasis is on plot not action, the odd fight is unavoidable





As per usual with survival horror titles, the story is moved on in cinematic sequences where the cast of weird characters spout ambiguous hints and warnings

This is a well-conceived, stylish and engrossing game. While *Silent Hill* has never offered the explosive, monster-slaying carnage of *Resident Evil*, the lack of boss baddie after boss baddie makes for a quieter, more cerebral and certainly more chilling game experience. After a few hours cocooned in the game's ceaseless darkness, with weird sounds and haunting music echoing around your living room (please, oh please don't play this game on a tiny TV with a mono speaker), you will be well and truly in the game's grip.

Afraid to go on, afraid to switch off. Afraid to put out the light and sleep. And if you do go on, tracking those last clues to one of the game's several surprise conclusions, you won't be disappointed: everyone gets what's coming to them.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten





It's all in your head

One aspect of *Silent Hill 2* that may disappoint some is the lack of monsters. There are several different types of zombie wandering around, and a frequently spotted boss monster – 'Pyramid Head'. Hardly a menagerie of the undead. However, this is more of a psychological thriller – a ghost story, perhaps – than a gore-fest, and **Edge** welcomes the emphasis on plot and atmosphere rather than bloodletting. Right until the end, you're not sure what the story is or who the baddies and goodies are. Or, indeed, if the lead character is just going mad. Or worse.

PaRappa The Rapper 2

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Sony** Developer: **Nana On-shaa** Price: **¥6,800 (£39)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**







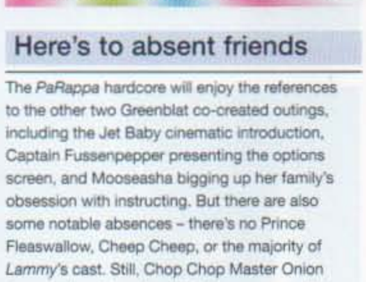


Before each level, a beatbox gives *PaRappa* novices a chance to practice a few of the rhymes ahead. The sequence can be skipped, but proves an annoyance



The camp octopus hairdresser, possessed by the spirit of the noodle, finds himself obsessed with noodle perms. PaRappa's solution, as ever, is to rap





T his feels like reviewing an album from a favourite artist: eight songs, a well-known cast, and a lot of expectation. But it'd be pointless to provide a track-by-track rundown, because so much of the joy in *PaRappa* is experiencing the music and atmosphere anew.

Sonically speaking, it's enough to say that, while the quality varies and some songs are more instantly memorable than others, fans of the series probably won't be disappointed. There are some superb visual set-pieces, too, including the music-stopping return of PJ Berry and some brilliant one-on-one rhyme warfare between PaRappa and his sequential nemesis, the Noodle Master ("I'll do damage like masheddys"). None of this is a surprise. Creatively, Nana On-shaa has always impressed.

Outside of what's expected, though, there are two broad changes to the game mechanic. Three meters along the bottom of the screen indicate how accurate, original and energetic the player's rhyme responses are, and, while they're non-essential, they do prove particularly helpful in attaining the coveted 'Cool' ranking. The other addition is much more critical: if the player drops a ranking, they're given opportunity to atone in an immediate replay of the failed section. The decision eliminates the possibility of sudden failure that marked both its prequel and *Um Jammer Lammy*, but it also makes the game much, much easier.

Each completed game circuit provides PaRappa with a different coloured hat, which indicates the difficulty level, but there's never any sense of challenge, nor, it seems, much incentive to continue beating the game in oneplayer mode. *Um Jammer Lammy* offered six remixed songs to play through as PaRappa once the main game had been completely beaten, but all *PaRappa 2* appears to conceal is a song jukebox for the ultra-Cool and feverishly persistent.

Which means exactly what **Edge** feared: PaRappa's sequel is consistently fun, and impeccably presented, but it's not as good as Koei's *Gitarooman*, and it's not as good as SNK's *Cool Cool Toon*. It's more accessible than both, though, and – thanks to Sony's support and the success of *PaRappa* abroad – a PAL release is almost assured. How successful it is will depend on how the buying public reacts to a series that seems so reluctant to evolve.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

Here's to absent friends

The *PaRappa* hardcore will enjoy the references to the other two Greenblat co-created outings, including the Jet Baby cinematic introduction, Captain Fussenpepper presenting the options screen, and Mooseasha bigging up her family's obsession with instructing. But there are also some notable absences – there's no Prince Fleaswallow, Cheep Cheep, or the majority of *Lammy*'s cast. Still, Chop Chop Master Onion does make a triumphant third appearance, this time teaching Romantic Karate, and his tiny onion followers partake in a kick-punch QTE subgame.

Capcom Vs SNK 2: Millionaire Fighting

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£39)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**

Part frustration, part power, part euphoria, *Capcom Vs SNK 2* excels where the two companies' home conversions have always succeeded – in breaking thumbs, joypads, and the spirits of opponents. Instinctive victory is a drug. 2D fighting junkies have thicker callouses than hardcore needlework veterans. This is their next fix.

The core facts are unsurprising. *Capcom Vs SNK 2* lets you choose from eight fighting styles (three Capcom, three SNK, and two that can be defined yourself), from more than 40 fighters and eight difficulty levels. There are Training, Versus, and Arcade options. The ratio modes from the previous game are there in limited form, along with three-on-three matches and straight single bouts. Almost everything in *Capcom Vs SNK 2* can be altered. In oneplayer, amusement is confined to self-improvement and (the supremely well executed) Score Attack. In twoplayer, as ever, entertainment is unlimited.

The new arenas are gorgeous, retaining the traditionally simple looping animation ethic, but rendering new ideas in high-resolution polygon majesty. There are the subtle nods to the fighting hardcore, too – Dudley and Billy Kane lurking at the back of the London stage, Hsien-Ko by the side of the revolving platform – and while more interaction between the fighters and the backgrounds may have been interesting, Capcom's argument could be that this is something for other games to consider. If reaction gaming is an addiction, then maybe this game's purity shouldn't be cut with distractions.

But because the surroundings are so clean, they also show where the game is weakest: the resolution and animation of its fighters. It's certainly no worse than the first Dreamcast version, but nor is it any better, and especially in light of *Guilty Gear X*'s stunning destruction, a game of this magnitude deserves something more.

If you buy this game to show off your console's power, you will end up confused and disillusioned. If you buy it for its fighting spirit – well aware of the fact that it has barely evolved in a decade, let alone since it's previous iteration – it won't disappoint. You're either a slave to graphics, or you're not; you judge a game on its soul, or on its bump mapping. The spirit of *Capcom Vs SNK 2* broke one of **Edge**'s DualShocks – which is recommendation enough.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten





Finishing with a super combo initiates a suitably over-the-top end sequences, as well as providing maximum gloating opportunity









Fighting brain

Oneplayer tournaments make for good practice, but as with most fighting games, *Millionaire Fighting*'s real strength is in twoplayer competition. There are three modes of play; One-On-One, Three-On-Three and Ratio Battle, a mode which has evolved from the prequel's focus and allows you to choose one of your three fighters to be considerably stronger than his or her team-mates. As ever, though, clever fighting psychology plays as much a part in two-dimensional victory as quick reactions and quick thinking. Chop Chop Master Onion was right: kick, punch – it's all in the mind.



An excellent scoring system affords points for using a variety of moves, as well as promoting attacking play. Manage to score enough during the oneplayer tournament, and you'll end up fighting Shin Gouki or Rugal

Alien Front Online

Format: **Dreamcast** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **Amusement Vision** Price: **¥5,800 (£33)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**



In-game advertising

Hit the streets of Tokyo and you can't round a corner or wreak destruction without spotting a Sega advert. While such visual flourishes for the arcade version may have furthered Sega's cause in Japan, the inclusion here is merely preaching to the converted. Still, expect advertising in videogames to become more prominent in the near future.







There's no denying that *Alien Front Online* contains a certain fun element when it comes to blasting alien scum, but this soon gets tiresome







The option of taking on the battle from the aliens' perspective is welcome. However, the unit types manoeuvre in the same manner reducing any extra tactical play which might have been introduced

Taking its inspiration from 'Starship Troopers', *Alien Front Online* pitches earthlings against extra-terrestrials in a battle for domination. And, as in Paul Verhoeven's movie, Amusement Vision clearly hoped to produce a shallow if compulsive splatter-fest. But while it has clearly achieved the first part of the brief, the second is missing in action.

Furthermore, UK gamers who purchase the game on import can forget about the final word in the game's title. While Japanese players have access to *Alien Front*'s network options – with novel microphone command capabilities – UK gamers will have to make do with the Arcade and Tactics modes alone, which is disheartening given the banal and simplistic gameplay of these options.

Understanding ET

At least any anti-alien feeling is avoided by giving players the opportunity to approach the conflict from both sides. The Arcade mode throws gamers into the conflict, with victory achieved by taking down a set number of enemies before the time limit ticks down. Three areas – Island, Tokyo and Siberia – must be defended until your three continues are exhausted. It's very flimsy stuff with the inclusion of more powerful weapon upgrades adding little to the mix. Only the addition of a well-implemented strafe command – which works by shifting your tank/alien's body sideways with the trigger button, while pressing forward on the analogue stick – hints at something more engaging.

But once avoiding incoming missiles by circling the enemy has been mastered, there is little to keep one coming back. While the Tactics mode promises much, it delivers little more than the Arcade option. Objectives are slightly more varied, ranging from search-and-destroy to protection, but the formula becomes tiresome very quickly.

One of the major limitations of *Alien Front Online* is its insistence on a plodding sense of speed. Replace the tank and alien units with polygonal humanoids and you have a typical arena combat game. But stripped of the slick framerates and balanced weapons associated with such titles as *Out Trigger* and *Quake III: Arena*, the game is pedestrian and sluggish. Had a finer emphasis been placed on tactical play and coordination of units, then something may have been salvaged. As it stands *Alien Front Online* is one of Sega's least inspired efforts.

Edge rating: Four out of ten

Sega Bass Fishing 2

Format: **Dreamcast** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **Wow Entertainment** Price: **$30 (£20)** Release: **Out now (US) Q4 (UK)**

Get Bass, or *Sega Bass Fishing* – to give it its western title – remains the only fishing game voluntarily played by the **Edge** team. The fact that it distils the massively popular but tremendously drawn out pastime into a thrill-focused affair is obvious: *Get Bass* is great entertainment because it only really deals with catching fish, arguably the most stimulating aspect of this mainly solitary venture. The game's reward is immediate.

Odd, then, that Wow Entertainment opted for a simulation approach when putting together this true sequel (*Sega Marine Fishing* is more of an offshoot, see **E**92). Traditional arcade elements remain – you can now select from a variety of characters with differing ability – but there's an injection of realism that infects the gameplay in a manner the original *Get Bass* proved immune to.

Being able to position your boat anywhere on the fishing lakes, even having control over the amount of throttle used seems like a reasonable addition – and, to a certain extent, *Get Bass* already offered this, albeit in more restricted fashion. In Free Fishing mode you also get to play around with parameters such as month, time of day and weather, although these are preset during competitions. Either way, once on your boat you get the usual depth and temperature readings, though this time presented via a radar-style display.

Fussy fish

The major difference remains the interaction with the fish, which prove unreasonably fussy customers. During the first two hours of play, with the exception of a couple of pike, no member of the bass family could be persuaded to bite regardless of the lure used. A second session proved more rewarding, but then highlighted another of the game's problems – the reeling-in experience is as erratic as the one found in *Sega Marine Fishing*. The tension on the line varies wildly as you delicately ease a catch towards you, while proving unfairly susceptible to breakage, too. The subtlety found in the original game is simply missing.

So, anyone expecting the arcade delights of *Get Bass* is likely to be disappointed. *Sega Bass Fishing 2* is too sim-heavy. Excessive parameters to deal with ensure it lacks the dynamism of the original, and, other than highlighting **Edge**'s inability to fish, ultimately it's just not as much fun.

Edge rating: Five out of ten







Sega cast offs

To further enhance the simulation aspect of the game, you get to determine your casting technique. Once you've positioned your boat and you're pretty sure the fish haven't been scared off by the motor, choose from overhead, backhand and sidehand casting, or even pitching (a mere motion of the rod's analogue stick determines the outcome). While seemingly pedantic, these do allow you to access areas other digital rods cannot reach, proving helpful in tight spots.



You'll be seeing a lot of this (left): fish eagerly coming up to your lure only to refrain from taking a bite. The US localisation process has resulted in stark menus and overall sombre presentation







While you can't drive your boat around the whole map, you do have free reign of the various areas you end up in. Catching fish is no longer automatic but rather a welcome hand-eye coordination test (left)

G-Surfers

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Midas Games** Developer: **Blade Interactive** Price: **£40** Release: **September 28**









A steep hill like the one above is often the prelude to a huge jump that might propel the craft clear over the top of a mountain, with a landing point several miles into the distance



With almost every entrant into the future racing genre attempting to imitate the style-over-substance commercial success of *Wipeout*, rather than the superior gameplay of *F-Zero*, it's encouraging to find one that dares to do something other than stick to the standard flash graphics, heavy weapons, and techno soundtrack formula.

While *G-Surfers* is unlikely to scare Nintendo's designers back to their drawing boards, the game is certainly a different proposition to most of the competition it's going to face on PS2. Set over 30 courses dotted around a 1km-resolution model of the earth, the game's most immediately striking feature is how drab it looks compared to second-generation PS2 software, and *XG3* in particular. Its simple textures and basic trackside models give *G-Surfers* a peculiarly flat appearance.

But there's more to a long-lasting future racer than mere looks, as players of *F-Zero X* will attest. Indeed, Nintendo's game has provided much of the inspiration for *G-Surfers*, with speed-up lanes, sweeping bends and sensitive analogue control.

Supercharged, yet uninspiring

The lack of weapons forces you to concentrate on gently easing the craft through a perfect racing line, watching for tell-tale signs of oversteer. Not easy when the speedometer is registering a rather unbelievable 15,000km/h. It's almost excessively fast, many of the courses playing like a breathless sprint to the finish rather than an actual race against 15 computer opponents. It takes some time to become accustomed to the speed of reactions required to navigate the more difficult tracks, which undulate, twist and corkscrew through the sky, without destroying your craft by piling into a solid wall or missing a jump. It's nowhere near as unforgiving as the original *Wipeout*, but there isn't the same scope for correcting mistakes via skilful driving as *F-Zero X* can boast.

The oneplayer mode is good enough to keep players interested for perhaps as long as *XG3* could manage, but the added value provided by the Trackman editor is excellent. Those prepared to invest the time and effort it will take to produce a professional-looking, playable effort will find *G-Surfers* becoming an ever more regular fixture in their console over the next few months.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

The mod squad

Traditionally, modifying software has been the preserve of the PC gamer. Simple editing facilities exist in many console racing titles, enabling generic track segments to be slotted together, but creating something original has always called for the flexibility and storage of a PC. Blade bucks the trend by including a PS2 version of the tools used to create the preset tracks. Dubbed Trackman, the utility enables an unprecedented degree of freedom to design unlimited numbers of new courses. If it's there in the main game, it can be recreated in Trackman. Very impressive.



Trackman makes the standard Scalextric-style editing tools found in console racers seem embarrassingly underpowered

Anarchy Online

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Funcom** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£45** Release: **Out now**

Persistent online worlds require the persistence of online gamers. Rich levels of gameplay are usually balanced by a learning curve that's more of an unforgiving vertical line. The 3D visuals that looked smoothly sensational as your character hiked across open countryside slow to a juddering crawl as you stroll beneath the towering stratoscrapers of an alien megalopolis. Multiplayer Internet RPGs continually trade-off speed for substance as eager players pit their wits against thousands of opponents across the globe.

Funcom's ambitious *Anarchy Online* abandons the familiar elf-and-broadsword approach in favour of genetically-enhanced humans and two-handed, electric Gofleprods. Set on an alien planet in the year 29475 AD, the game's designers have imagineered a landscape shattered by the threat of war between idealistic rebel clans and the well-funded, but morally bankrupt, Omni-Tek corporation. Of course, this is merely a futuristic gloss. Scrape off this smart sci-fi shell and *Anarchy Online* retains the basic 'kill, adventure and loot' style of *Everquest* and others.

Style and significant substance

Nevertheless, *Anarchy Online* approaches its task with an notable degree of style. Unlike the simpler, happy-go-fraggy joys of firstperson shooters, Internet RPGs delight in developing a history, complex social structure and, more often than not, rely on an evolving storyline. *Anarchy Online* is no different. Underpinned by a four-year story arc, characters have the chance to develop in a training zone before being cut loose in a 3D environment that is as beautiful as it is dangerous. Admittedly, this babying section is frustratingly tedious. But it gives new players the chance to juggle their character's statistics and to learn how to move, fight and interact with the gameworld.

What follows is a go-anywhere, do-anything game of murder, missions, body enhancements and black market tech-trafficking. A huge variety of weapons and Nano-Tek programs (think spells) keep the action interesting as characters compete to improve their abilities and to own the best in life-snuffing gadgetry. The sheer scope of the game, and the insignificant part that you play in it, makes for a humbling experience. With thousands of players, each with their own plans and motivations, the plot could theoretically spin off in any direction.





Anarchy Online offers the player an enormous world to explore, together with the option to assume either a first or thirdperson perspective for the adventuring



Underneath the title's sci-fi style and classy presentation, you character is defined by myriad traditional RPG statistics

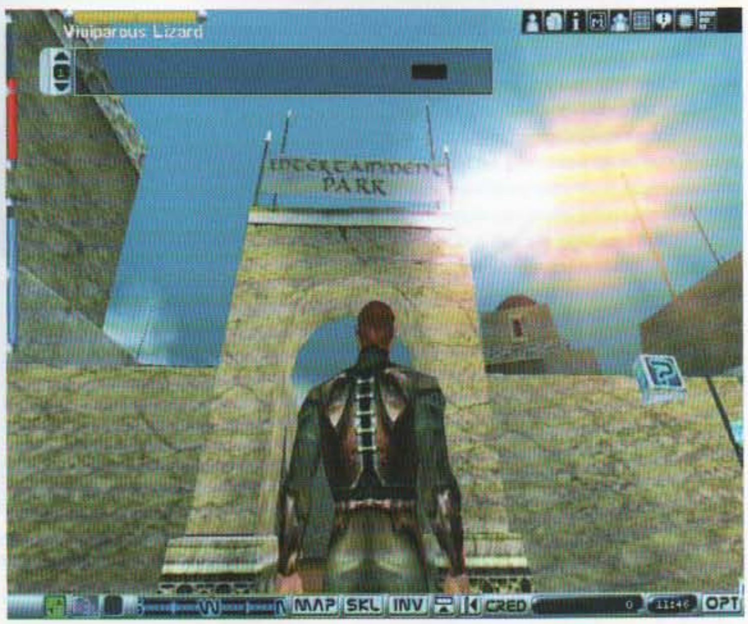
Yet despite this anarchic freedom, it's debatable whether Funcom's RPG will appeal to more than just a hardcore of Internet players. It's not the easiest game to pick up, and a fast Net connection isn't just recommended, it's practically vital for longterm play. But the question remains: can you fairly review a game that boasts more than four years of gameplay?

Edge rating: Six out of ten









As impressive as its 3D world can be, *Anarchy Online*'s beauty can be spoiled by a combination of a slow Net connection and its complex city environments. When it works, though, it works well

SpyHunter

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Midway** Developer: **Paradigm Entertainment** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**





Most missions require you to blow things up but the odd escort duty does sneak in. Machine gun and missiles are now joined by lasers and flamethrowers, for instance



The visuals are best described as functional, although the sensation of speed is excellent. It's a worthy update to the 1983 original – with the exception of loading screens, there's rarely a dull moment to be had

As an update to a much loved agent of the 8bit community, *SpyHunter* does a good job. It adds a third dimension to the action – the extra 120bits helping cosmetically – but much of the essence of the original has been retained. It's fast, furious and challenging.

Predictably, your vehicle offers all of the weapons at your disposal in the 1983 game, as well as a few new ones, while also possessing the expected ability to morph into a boat whenever the need arises. In order to flesh things out a little, a suitably clichéd plot has been thrown in with the oneplayer experience structured into 14 time-limited missions of increasing difficulty. The latter contain several objectives per sortie – one primary, more secondary – and clearing these becomes key in unlocking subsequent levels. Although thoroughly linear in nature, the inclusion of numerous alternate routes give the illusion of structure complexity.

Despite its pace, the title's limiting premise ensures things eventually get a little repetitive. Furthermore, it's a little rough around the edges (handling and collision dynamics the main culprits) but the major elements certainly work well enough together to deliver an exciting – if somewhat shallow – ride.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

Thunderhawk: Operation Phoenix

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Eidos** Developer: **Core Design** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

The third in a series that began on the Mega CD add-on for Sega's Mega Drive, *Operation Phoenix* distances itself from its predecessor aesthetically and technically, but gameplay has failed to keep up.

The game's straightforward swoop and shoot dynamic may be old skool, but it holds little of the retro chic so conspicuous in other past blasters. It feels dated. How much this affects you depends on your susceptibility to nostalgia, but on top of this the game isn't particularly well structured. An absurd number of loading screens have to be endured before getting to fly, and there's no immediate restart should you die. Given the time you're made to wait, you'd expect the briefings to offer clearer instructions of your tasks.

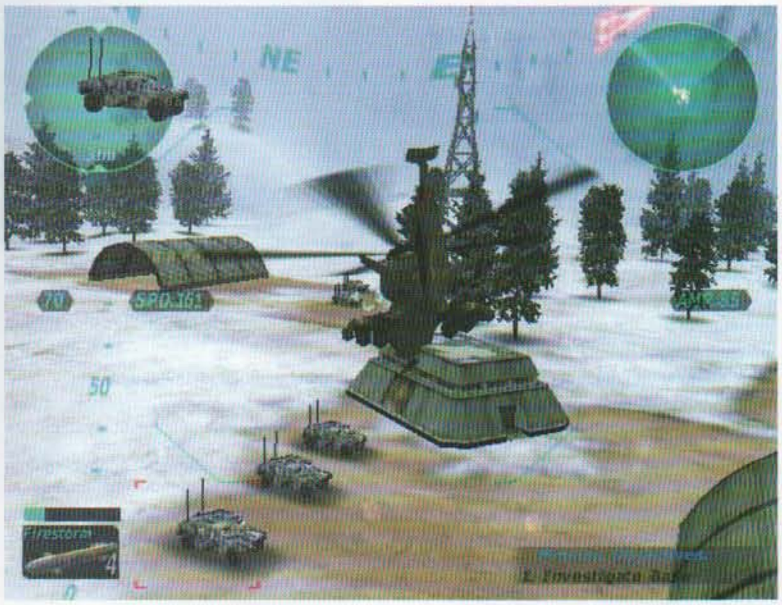
The mission variety is pleasing, if clichéd, and there are times when things get suitably engrossing. And yet the overall sluggish nature of your helicopter, coupled with the game's tendency to feel unreasonably unbalanced, ensures *Operation Phoenix* offers moments of frustration, too. It remains a mostly competent title with occasional flashes of fun. But other than better graphics, it just hasn't moved anything significantly on from its predecessors.

Edge rating: Five out of ten





There's a reasonable amount of variety in terms of missions, but nothing that you won't have already come across in countless aircraft based combat titles



Two cockpit views are offered, both of which work well. Although reasonably arcade-like, your helicopter still feels too slow in many of the frantic situations you encounter. Still, it's reasonable entertainment

Warioland 4

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥5,800 (£33)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**

While the original *Warioland* was a mediocre platformer, it soon found its niche as a platform puzzler. Control of the tiny villain is slightly stodgy compared to, say, *Mario*, but inside this dynamic it isn't such an issue. There are still pixel-perfect jumps and enemy heads to stomp, but the emphasis is on switch hitting and object manipulation.

Four zones are available initially, each containing four levels and a boss. Each of these hides five objects – four pieces of a jewel, and a key – which must be collected. They can be deviously hidden, but the search is leisurely; the only moments of panic come as the player attempts to return to the hub in order to exit a level, when Wario must find a switch and rush back to the start within a time limit. This works particularly well in the volcano complex, where hitting the switch also moves the caves into the Ice Age and freezes the lava flows, slickly reworking the return.

And that's it. Occasionally gorgeous, absolutely solid, and much too short, *Wario*'s only real crime is conservatism. It rarely provides moments of adrenaline, or too many tests of intellect, but it's pleasant enough while it lasts.

Edge rating: Six out of ten



Money collected in each level can be spent on simple one-button mini-games, which in turn can win power-ups for the end-of-zone bosses. The money also serves as a buffer for the level's time limit





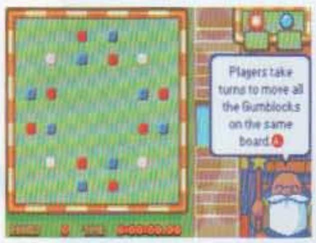
Replay value comes via hidden bonuses; each level hides a CD of ambient sound-effect-based music, which can be heard in the mouth of the game's isometric hub

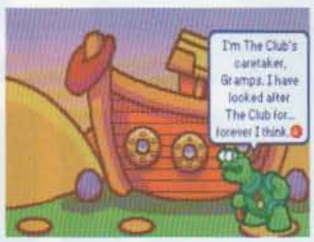
Denki Blocks

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Rage** Developer: **Denki** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**



Behold, a *Denki Blocks* puzzle, hosted by a talking mole. Despite the title's obvious simplicity, the puzzles are ingeniously designed. It's a shame that Rage couldn't afford to include the GBA tilt control





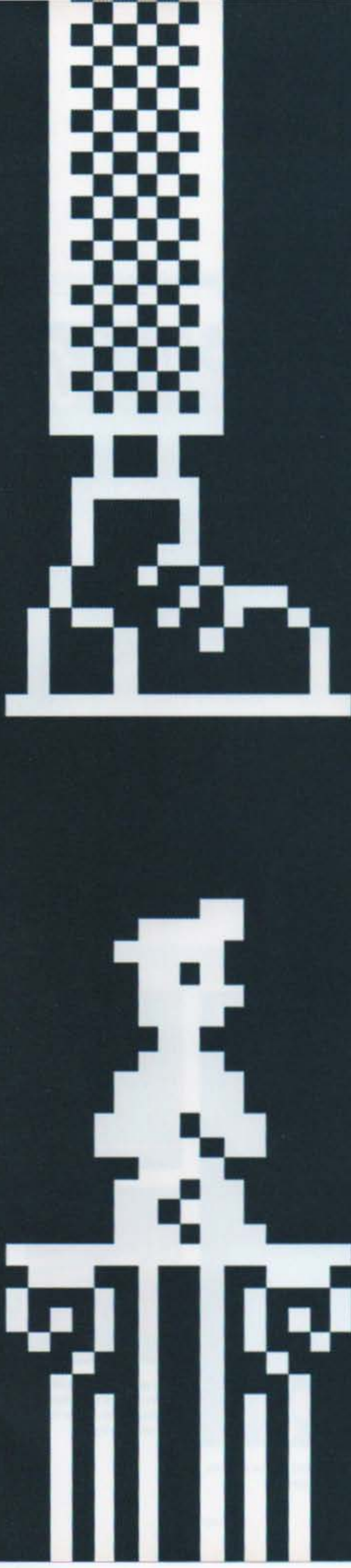
For a game coded in Aberdeen, *Denki Blocks* does a remarkable job of convincing the player that it was crafted in downtown Kyoto

Rumours of the death of originality in puzzle games are greatly exaggerated. Ostensibly, Rage's colourful block-moving enterprise has all the hallmarks of being another *Tetris* also-ran, but what distinguishes *Denki Blocks* from its competitors is the elegant brilliance of its concept, and the plethora of modes that extend the idea. Indeed, it was made Overall Best Game Of The Show at ECTS.

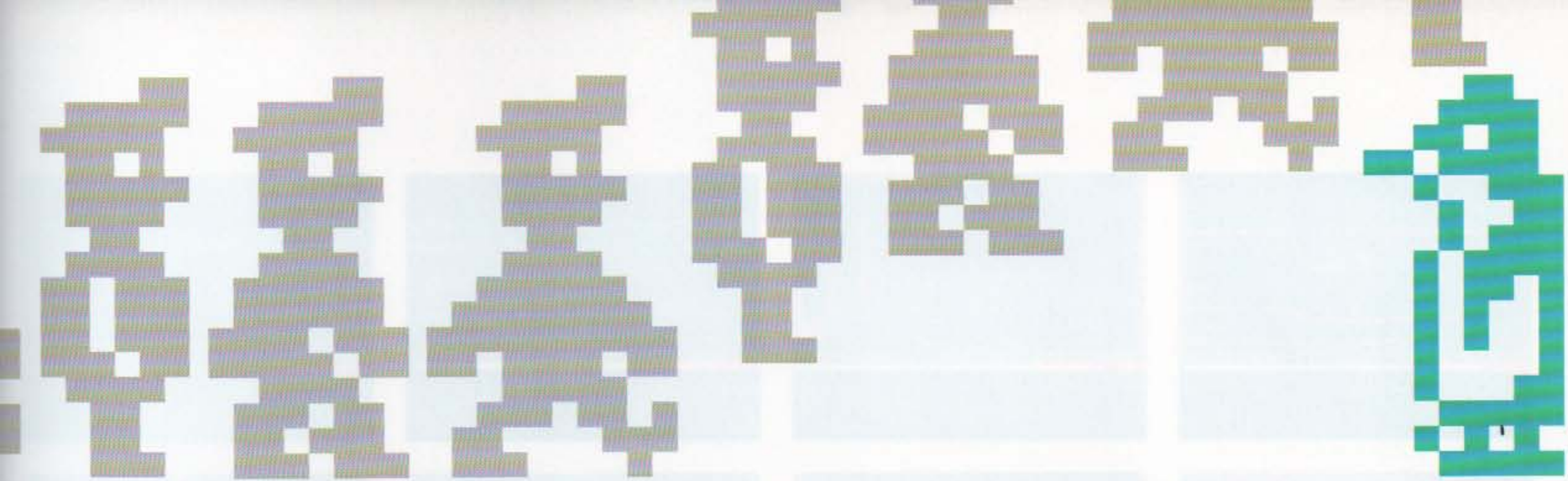
The action predominately involves moving bars of coloured blocks to meet their similarly hued brethren. This requires plenty of forethought and spatial awareness, particularly when attempting to construct a pre-specified pattern to get a bonus. It's a tour de force of simple yet hugely engrossing game design with a perfect learning curve. As the levels get harder, it's increasingly necessary to follow the exact correct procedure, so challenge and longevity are guaranteed.

A twoplayer mode allows standard time trial play or the chance to design puzzles for someone else to attempt. Don't be taken in by its zany anime stylings – *Denki Blocks* has the simplicity, depth and enjoyability to put it among the top flight of puzzlers. One of the better games the GBA has to offer.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten



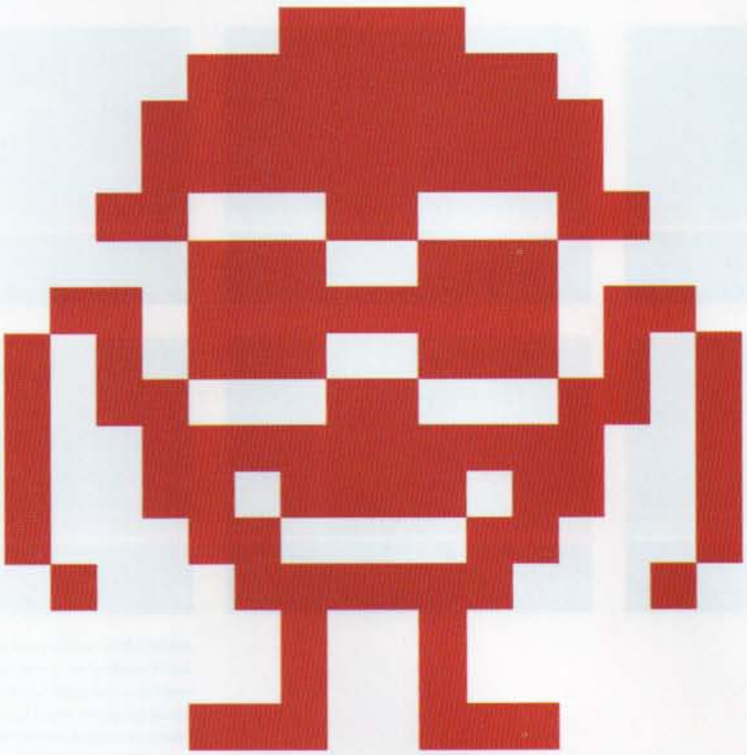
Format: **ZX Spectrum**
Publisher: **Bug-Byte**
Developer: **Matthew Smith**
Origin: **UK**
Original release date: **1983**



The making of…

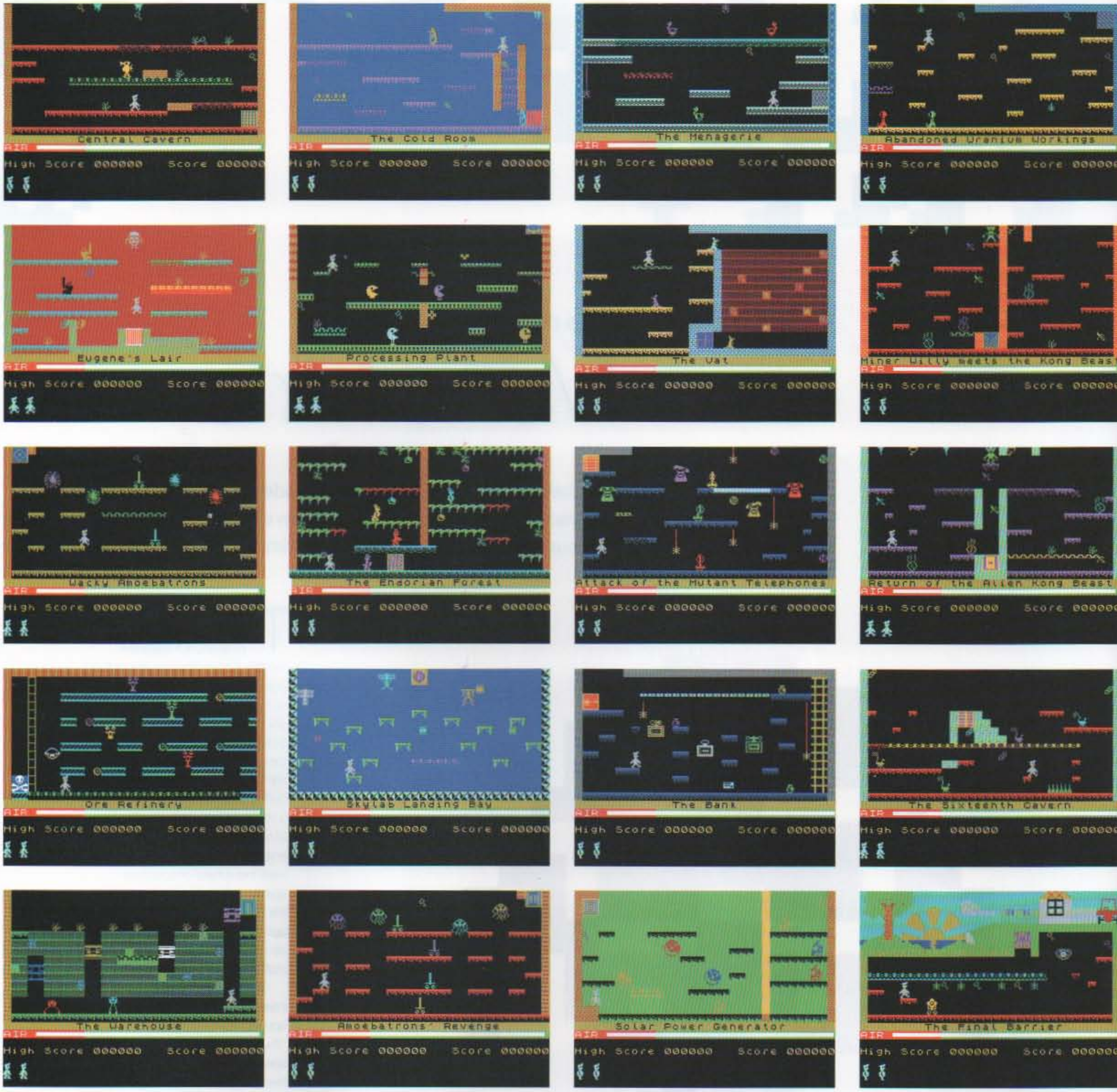
Manic Miner

Matthew Smith is a rare thing in the videogame industry: a bona fide 'character'. But after coding Spectrum classics, he disappeared and the rumour mill started up. Edge tracks him down and gets the inside story



There are few mysteries in the world of videogame creation, but **Matthew Smith**'s life has become the stuff of legend. Most know the bare bones of his extraordinary story: coded *Manic Miner* in '83; helped form Software Projects in '84; backed up the success of his first title with *Jet Set Willy* in late '84; and then nothing. Software Projects disappeared under a cloud and so did Smith. Rumours of his rock 'n' roll lifestyle culminating in a period living in a Dutch commune were the subject of countless spectrum Web sites throughout the '90s. And then a couple of years ago he re-emerged in the UK with his very own: http://www.the-good-stuff.freeserve.co.uk/index.html.

But tracking Smith down for an interview didn't get any easier. His appearance on Channel 4's 'Thumb Candy' only served to fuel speculation about his current life. A few emails were eventually answered, but he was non-committal. Smith wasn't about to talk to the press he seemed to distrust so much. A visit to



Manic Miner was a great game back in '83, but it hardly stands the test of time. The mystique surrounding Matthew Smith's life has given the game – and its sequel, *Jet Set Willy* – legendary status. While Miner Willy's first quest was difficult to complete, *Jet Set Willy* could only be finished with the use of poke commands

his front door, in the sleepy Yorkshire village of Dewsbury, was **Edge**'s last recourse. Expecting a flea in the ear, **Edge** was pleasantly surprised to find that Smith was only too happy to discuss the mystique which still surrounds his life and works. The truth, it seems, is far more banal.

"I never disappeared," Smith claims. "I was at home and didn't realise about the comp.sis.sinclair 'Where Is Matthew Smith?' stuff until recently. I went to Holland in '95 and came back in '97. Then I started at Runecraft. There's no real mystery. My disappearance was not my decision, it was yours and your predecessors'. After leaving Software Projects I was signing on the dot [dole], which is what I'm doing now."

But back in 1983 Smith was a coding celebrity. His unkempt appearance led to questions over his lifestyle, and were the basis of many news stories and interviews in all the popular Spectrum magazines. When the seminal *Manic Miner* – complete with pixel-perfect collision detection, novel level designs and a distinct aesthetic – hit stores, reviewers were intrigued to discover it had been programmed by a jobless 17-year-old.

"I had been programming from the age of 13 on a TRS 80," continues Smith. "I did some of the graphics for *The Birds And The Bees* and then did *Styx* for Bug-Byte. But *Manic Miner* took just eight weeks. There were 20 levels, but I did most of the testing on the first level. Once it was going, then it was just about designing the levels. There were no niggling problems whatsoever." Structurally Miner Willy's exploits were simple: collect the level key and take it to the exit point. But it was the graphical flair – complete with animated telephones and flying lavatories – which set it apart. Other novelties, such as gently collapsing platforms and an oxygen meter gave the game its distinctive flavour. Smith, however, remains modest about the game's achievements: "I have to say Bill Hoag was an inspiration. He did all the decent games on the TRS 80. He did *Miner '49er*. It's remarkably similar, and I had that before I wrote *Manic Miner*. It's almost fair to call it a rip-off. I think he had a triangular jump rather than a parabolic one, but otherwise it was just a matter of the Atari graphics and the Spectrum graphics. I think it broke the mould a bit on the Spectrum. It made really good use of that machine back in '83. I got the money upon completing *Styx*, which was £3,000, and I got £8,000 for *Manic Miner*."

But were the stories about the coder once known as the millionaire programmer completely false? "In the end I worked out that I got about £35,000 from Bug-Byte altogether. But it was like extracting teeth. Suing was a normal part of wage negotiation. It was standard practice. The money didn't exist until the game went on sale, but it was obvious *Manic Miner* was going to be a hit. I must say, I squandered the cash I had. If I'd known I wasn't going to get any more I wouldn't have. Still not much excuse for blowing that amount."

Flushed with the success of *Manic Miner*, Smith was keen to keep the momentum going with two sequels: *Jet Set Willy* and the now infamous *Miner Willy Meets The Taxman*. But Smith was dissatisfied with his publisher and decided to set up his own publishing house, Software Projects. "It was originally going to be me and Alan Maton. He worked for Bug-Byte, but saw that the grass was greener. Then Alan came to me one day and said, 'I met this guy who's into financing and he's good at business and he does games.' So when we actually started Software Projects there were three of us. I was actually a minority shareholder in that. There was no finance involved. I actually became a full shareholder when I finished *Jet Set Willy*, somewhere around 33 per cent, but still short of that magic 50 mark. If I got my third I would still have been happy – I thought if I had a third of the company, it meant I could spend a third of the cash."

If *Manic Miner* was a breeze for the young coder, the technical leap made by *Jet Set Willy* combined with the pressures of forming Software Projects proved debilitating. "Designing the levels for *Jet Set Willy* actually did take a lot of time, but there were external pressures – partners, essentially. Apparently I was the director of a publishing house, but I was writing the game at the same time. *Jet Set Willy* took eight months. Though there were three times as many screens as *Manic Miner*, there was no excuse. It was pure management drag. I was getting just a basic salary of £50 a week. The chief programmer almost starved to death. That's where it all went wrong. They were sabotaging my phone line. They thought if I was on the Internet to America, it meant I was phoning America. They thought I was their wayward child rather than a director."

During Smith's time at Software Projects other coders were taken on and the company even considered a budget line, to be called Software Supersavers. *Miner Willy Meets The Taxman* (which had the working title of *The Mega Tree*), *Attack Of The Mutant Zombie Flesh Eating Chickens From Mars* and a top-down football game, tentatively entitled *Footy*, were all partly coded, but never completed by Smith. Was the decline of Software Projects a case of mismanagement or irresponsibility on his part?

"I was at Stonehenge in '84 but not in '85. Things were getting heavy, man" he says, cryptically – although it's worth remembering that '85 witnessed a police crackdown on the travelling community, culminating in the 'Battle Of The Beanfield' near Stonehenge.

"Irresponsibility? Okay I confess to that but I never got a single payment for *Jet Set Willy*. I was livid. It was always down to 'accounting difficulties'. Alan did most of the running of the company. I was going to do the games and he was going to do the publishing. And originally there was going to be this 50/50 split. Lovely jubbly. He got the tapes duplicated, saw all the press and distribution. Tommy, he sat in the background and made executive decisions and, er… it was all working as long as it worked. Somehow when it all went sour it was me and Alan who fell out. Software Projects was eventually dissolved by decree in 1989."

After a short spell at Runecraft (crunching a dictionary into a Game Boy Color *Scrabble* title) Matt Smith is back on the Net and using his spare time to update his home page. No big projects are planned, but his story is sure to remain a talking point in Spectrum discussion groups. After being deported from Holland in 1997 Smith decided to change his name to Matt from Earth – the monicker he prefers to use whenever anyone asks for his autograph. But is he still surprised by the unshakable interest in his life and works?

"I used to be. I suppose it's quite nice really. Well, I guess it's going to happen if I don't reply to my emails." The reclusive coder's mind wanders for a brief second before he indicates the interview is over. "Do you want to meet the guy who wrote *Chuckie Egg*?" he ends. "He works just up the road."

RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 39, December 1996

After years of meagre initiatives and unfulfilled promises, Apple says that games are its 'number one priority'" ran the introduction to **Edge**'s cover feature, a fruit-laden paean to the joys of Mac hardware. You probably didn't notice, what with the constant change in font size and silver-on apple-green colour scheme of the opening paragraph, but maybe that was the plan; an appropriately cautious piece implied serious cynicism in the face of the Cupertino company's fruity exaltations. *WaveRace 64* scoring nine and the justified accolade of a 'modern classic' proved a little more uplifting.

The NuMedia section pushed the boundaries of interactive entertainment ever further, this time reviewing Organic Art clothing – acid-fried robots drawing on your T-shirt with a spirograph – referencing an earlier feature with Computer Artworks founder William Latham. He's busy with 'The Thing' now, of course, but five years ago the Oxford graduate was reclining across a double-page spread, immediately preceded by an advert for Sega's PC conversion of *Virtua Fighter*. The advert's tagline, writ large: 'Some people have got a face you just want to punch'. Unfortunate, that.

DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?

"Some parts of Sprockets are 'duh-ware'... and some of them are what we call 'cool-ware'" Apple's **Ben Calica** talk **Edge**'s language

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?

"This buxom brunette has been making game players and developers drool at her hard hitting, in-your-face babe antics. Does life really get any better than this?"

TESTSCREENS (AND RATINGS)

Crash Bandicoot (PS; 7/10), *WaveRace 64* (N64; 9/10), *Soviet Strike* (PS; 7/10), *World Wide Soccer '97* (Saturn; 8/10), *Supersonic Races* (PS; 7/10), *Burning Road* (PS; 5/10)



1



2



3



4



5

1. Latham looks daft, but not as daft as **Edge**, which contrives to misspell William 2. *D2*, one of the M2's key titles, whose arrival was rumoured to be 'imminent' 3. What happens when **Edge**'s art ed comes back from holiday 4. **Edge** gets overexcited by *WaveRace 64*... 5. And Namco's *Aqua Jet*: "Aqua ski-ing may well replace car racing in the hearts of game designers"

pixelperfect

The industry's favourites from yesteryear. This month, Criterion Games concept design manager **Paul Davies** remembers *Pet Space Invaders*





Pet Space Invaders proved a more enticing prospect than Batting The Rat for young Davies

The time I remember thinking 'this is unique and special, and I love it' was at a school fair when I was 11 or 12. Outside people were playing Bat The Rat or throwing sponges at teachers. Inside there was a queue to play *Pet Space Invaders*.

My friend already had me addicted to the *Space Invaders* coin-op in our local Tesco, and I was in the computer club (as one of those thickies who only played games, sorry). Though our Commodore Pets were still new, and creating such a stir for that reason alone, I already felt one step ahead. I knew there was something big in this, and maybe I could make friends by being good at it in some way. In fact, I was just obsessed with games running on computers. Since then I've been unable to suppress excitement toward something new and exciting around this type of thing.

It's not that I thought right then and there watching people play *Pet Space Invaders*, 'I must work in this industry'. Playing Space Invaders for the first time wasn't really even so momentous. At age 11 you tend to think of things as 'whatever' because you're less precious and there's always other stuff. But something clicked mentally.

FAQ

Satoru Iwata

Director and general manager, corporate planning division, Nintendo Co Ltd



A subsidiary of Nintendo Co Ltd, HAL Laboratory has, over the years, worked remarkably closely with Kyoto's premier electronic entertainment provider, to the point where much of its work is virtually indistinguishable from its parent company. As head of the outfit, **Satoru Iwata** has worked alongside supreme videogame designer Shigeru Miyamoto for a substantial part of his professional life. It's been a desirable partnership, certainly, but, history has shown, not just a one-sided one – Iwata-san's softco is more than capable of producing its own little interactive gems, as examples such as *Kirby's Tilt & Tumble* for the GBC prove so convincingly. In his current position within NCL's top brass, the ever-jubilant Iwata-san is mainly responsible for all things GameCube. Anyone doubting the potential of Nintendo's 128bit machine clearly hasn't had a chat with the company's general manager of the corporate planning division.

What was the first videogame you played?
I think it was *Pong*, the tennis TV-type game.

What was the first computer/games machine you owned?
Well, I recall I had a Hewlett Packard magnetic reader system, and it was the first programmable calculator back in those days. It's hard to explain to those who only have the kind of state of the art technology [found in today's game machines]. I bought it by doing some part-time work – I was a student [at the time and therefore] not working full time.

What was the first thing you ever created for a computer or console?
A 'Star Trek' game. I remember I read an article saying there was a 'Star Trek' game, and I really wanted to make one with the device I had. So I did it.

What was your first job in the industry, and what was the first thing you ever designed?
Before the NES hit the Japanese market [in 1983], there was the Commodore VIC-20, and I was one of the people to make games for that particular machine. Few people know this, but the VIC-20 was actually created in Japan. I think it was around the time when I was studying at university, and I had friends who worked at the company. Sometimes they asked me to make software, sometimes they asked me to make games for the VIC-20. So that's why I was working, part-time, for them.

What's your favourite game ever, and why?
The first *Kirby* game. And recently I love *Smash Brothers* – that's my work also [laughs].

What was the last game you played, and what did you think of it?
Mario Kart Advance. It was fun enough. I also played *Animal Forest* after coming back from the E3 show. But, of course, I don't have much time to play games.

How many hours a week do you actually spend playing games?
Before I had plenty of time to play, but unfortunately recently I can't take much time out for this any more. Even if you include the time that I spend supervising some of the activities at Nintendo, I think it probably just ends up being a couple of hours.

What's the first game you look for when you walk into an arcade?
Unfortunately, I don't have the time to go to arcades either, so I'm actually missing out on the latest coin-op industry craze. I think *Daytona USA* was probably the very last arcade game I played a lot.

Which Web site do you most regularly visit?
Because I'm much faster at reading Japanese than English, most of them are Japanese sites. The one type I go to a lot are the news sites that talk a lot about the latest personal computer situation, in Japanese.

What game would you most like to have worked on?
Most of the games I have adored are, of course, the ones created by Mr Miyamoto – and fortunately I have been working very closely with Mr Miyamoto for a long time. So even though I haven't worked on these games directly, I somehow feel that I've been part of creating these games.

"The ideal situation is for us to provide simple gameplay which people can then play continuously, and hopefully for long periods of time"

Of all the games you've been involved in in the past, what's your favourite, and why?
The two I mentioned earlier: the original *Kirby* game and *Smash Brothers*, because I was involved pretty closely and deeply in the development of these two.

What new development in videogames would you most like to see?
Actually, that's one of the topics I often discuss with Mr Miyamoto. As you know, these days gamers are demanding a lot more from us developers, and so as a result we work really hard to include as many ideas as we can into one game, and I think people enjoy them. But if we put in some idea, they're likely to enjoy it and then forget about it by the next morning. About 20 years ago, when we started in this industry, if we just created something simple people used to play with it and enjoy it for a long time. So, the ideal situation is for us to provide simple gameplay which people can then play continuously, and hopefully enjoy for long periods of time. Also, because of the complexity and too much sophistication of the current gameplay, I believe there are many people who want to play games but just don't feel like doing so. And that's something I'm always considering whenever we're working on new software, otherwise the workload will continue to add up to the extent that we would explode.

What do you enjoy most about working in the videogame industry?
As I've said earlier, for me, working with Mr Miyamoto really is the best thing [laughs, as Miyamoto-san happens to be sitting to his left]. At least I'm honest.

Whose work do you most admire?
Mr Miyamoto's.

inbox

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Or email:
edge@futurenet.co.uk

Although I await the new issue of **Edge** each month with even more anticipation than I might if I were expecting the England football team to triumph next year, I always dread the last few pages, however perversely drawn to them I am.

I'm not normally a letter writer, usually never fired up enough to actually put pen to paper, preferring instead to chew on a wooden spoon before resuming my read. However, concern was raised when, for about the hundredth time, I read the line '...my casual-gamer friends'. Casual gamers? Do they exist? They shouldn't.

It should not be that in this enlightened era and new dawn of games machines and game design that a game does not draw you in for an extended, potentially relationship-destroying session. Games should be anything but casual. If you pick up the joypad for a five-minute blast and can just as easily put it down and walk away, then the game isn't doing its job.

Andrew Hatcher, via email

A persuasive argument, but one that's difficult to agree with. If gaming truly is a massmarket pastime, then it should happily cater for all people, and not everyone has the time – or inclination – to devote hours to a game, no matter how addictive.

I have been an avid **Edge** reader for over four years now and have always based my purchases on **Edge**'s opinions.

However, lately I find myself having to turn to reviews in other publications, since key game reviews in **Edge** are either late or simply non-existent. I've purchased titles such as *Sonic Adventure 2*, *Alone In The Dark* and *Max Payne* almost a full month before they finally get reviewed in **Edge**.

Even more worrying is some titles' complete lack of coverage – case in point: *ATV Offroad*. Having bought this game, and played it non-stop for many weeks, I decided to check through some back issues to compare my opinions with **Edge**'s, only to find... well, nothing.

While it is inevitable that submission codes are occasionally delayed, it is unacceptable that a review of a AAA title that is already on the shelves is postponed to the following month's issue, especially when other publications have already printed reviews. If such circumstances are unavoidable, could **Edge** not post a review of the title online to suffice readers until the following issue is released?

I look forward to your *ATV* review and an increase in the amount of code arriving in your office.

Pete Campbell, via email

For starters, we will not review incomplete beta code – simple as that. Many other games magazines can only claim 'exclusivity' by doing so. We only review finished, working games. And if that means our judgement is delayed, then so be it. We'd rather be right than first.

Secondly, it is not **Edge**'s remit to review every single release. We prefer to focus on games that stand out from the crowd because they're important technically, qualitatively, innovatively or culturally. *ATV Offroad* was none of these.

However, with the rapid growth in gaming traffic, you can look forward to an increase in the amount of reviews in future issues.

In a recent review you stated that F1 motors were omitted from the PAL version of *Gran Turismo 3*. Why is it then that I've just got one? As one would expect this F1 car (Polyphony 002) sports exceptional handling and is very, very fast. Lovely, yes? No, it isn't...

Given that I am currently a third of the way through the game, I now find that I can use this superfast box with wheels in most of the remaining championships, allowing me to leave the opposition for dead. Spoiler or what?

It could be argued that I could simply leave this beast in the garage and continue using lesser machines. I've tried that, but find the other cars to be slow and handle like startled pigs in comparison. I suggest you guys write a wee chapter on this shocking occurrence in a future issue and drop *GT3* a point. FYI I got the F1 car after winning the Seattle Endurance race.

Ian (not Ian), via email

For God's sake, where's your willpower, man?

Having for too long believed the largely negative press about Dreamcast, I recently decided to take the advantage of its early death and actually go out and buy one on the cheap. I managed to pick up the machine, a VGA box, memory card and *Quake III* for just under £100. Brand new. Shortly after, I picked up used copies of *Sega Rally* (£3), *HOTD2* (£10), *Crazy Taxi* (£13), etc.

I was surprised. On my 19-inch monitor these games look wonderful. The machine is small and quick – the controller easier to hold than the N64 one. The graphics are sharp and the 3D worlds realistic, solid and fast. I can't help wondering how different things might have been if I and many others had been more aware two years ago just how much fun this little machine could be. Perhaps by now we'd be playing first-class implementations of *Half-Life*, and Rare might have written *Perfect*



Ian is upset that he's got his hands on a top car in *Gran Turismo 3* – **Edge** should be so lucky



Once again the Dreamcast marketing mooks are berated on the **Edge** letters page. When will Sega take heed and rain retribution on their heads?

Dark for Dreamcast.

Instead, I have memories of botched release strategies combined with dead shop-based advertising units sporting blank screens. In light of all this I would like, through the pages of **Edge**, to offer Sega some post-horse-bolted-type advice. Go find the inbreds who marketed and supported the DC in Europe, round them up in a large square in Tokyo and then publicly pelt them with something both cold and smelly. You don't want these people in your company for a moment longer, Sega.

Trevor Lawford, via email

Edge's love affair with Dreamcast will continue long after it's High Street presence has vanished. Expect an extended obituary in the near future.

I am amazed at the amount of attention that the size of the Xbox is getting. I am only interested in playing games, and as such I'm too busy to notice the machine I'm playing on. My son has a PlayStation 2 and I have a Dreamcast. The Dreamcast looks tacky next to the PS2, but it's a far more enjoyable experience.

Also I wish to take exception to Ken Kutaragi's (**E**100) comments concerning the Xbox. He says that, "Microsoft does not understand entertainment." Considering the amount of entertainment Sony has offered PS2 owners, this is surely the pot calling the kettle black?

The only things Sony have to offer are *GT3* and *MGS2*. The Xbox looks to have some really good titles available at launch that look on a par with PS2 games currently on the market. Sony say that it takes about 18 months to two years for really good-quality games to arrive on a new system. If this is true, just imagine the quality of Xbox games in 18 months' time. I think Sony have shot themselves in the foot with the PS2, because it is not that good a machine, but they can't just ditch it or they will end up with the Sega factor.

The Dreamcast failed because of the way they dropped the Saturn. Sony now have to compete with two superior machines, and it's nice to know that the great Sony can make mistakes. It will just take a brave (or foolish) person to tell them.

Dave Ponsford, via email

It's certainly true that Xbox is gaining ground in **Edge**'s regard: a screenshot here, a quote there. However, it still has a lot to prove, and Sony is clearly just getting into its stride. Oh, and compared to GameCube, the Xbox isn't just large – it's obese.

It was particularly interesting to read about *Burnout*, which looks like it could be the perfect console racer. What the people at Criterion seem to be aware of is that a racegame should not only be technically correct, but it should also be fun.

Take for instance the two recent PS2-racers *Gran Turismo 3* and *Rumble Racing*. Being a big fan of racegames I got both games right after their release. I have to admit, though, (and I know that I risk sounding blasphemous to most PS2 fans) that *Rumble Racing* is the game I play by far the most.

Let me explain: while *Gran Turismo* is technically a marvel, and while it has that 'mouth falling open' quality, I found myself becoming bored with it quite quickly. This, while *Rumble Racing* has hardly left my PS2 since I bought it. The pure thrill of a well-made (albeit admittedly quite ridiculous) arcade racer is something that is sorely missing from the *Gran Turismo* games.

Now, I am not saying that *Gran Turismo 4* should have an Arcade mode where your Mazda sports car can pump grenades into the back of the latest Ferrari-model, but what I would like to see is a little less emphasis on the reality aspect and an infusion of some more fun. I own all three *Gran Turismo* games, and whenever I want to impress somebody I fire up *Gran Turismo 3*, but even combined I have not played the three *Gran Turismo* games longer than games like *Speed Devils* or classics like *Lotus 2* on the Commodore Amiga or the arcade version of *Out Run*. Maybe SCEE can take a page out of the book of Bizarre Creations and have a close look at *Metropolis Street Racer*?

I know that, judging by the sales figures of *GT3*, most people will not agree with me, but in the meanwhile I think I will pass on a potential *GT4* and keep a lookout for *Burnout* and *Project Gotham*.

Patrick Rijnders, via email

Surely the beauty of videogaming is that you're not limited to owning just one title on one machine...

After reading Steven Poole's interesting and valid article concerning gaming clichés, I felt compelled to write in disbelief at the entry of 'turn-based battles' as an irrational and un-needed device.

Clearly, this aspect, found regularly in the most successful of RPGs (in both quality and popularity), serves an integral and positive purpose. When it was seen commercially in *Final Fantasy III-VI*, it was hailed by most as a hugely enhancing and advantageous aspect of an excellent game. This was most certainly the case. Turn-based battles in that (as with subsequent counterparts) imbued an important and deep tactical facet to the 'hack 'n' slash' alternative, which demands no significant skill or mental dexterity and often provides only monotone button bashing – an eventuality which

> "I wish to take exception to Ken Kutaragi's comments concerning the Xbox. This is surely the pot calling the kettle black?



Edge's *Max Payne* review (six out of ten) roused the fearless Mr Anon, who then proceeded to bravely berate the entire team for its ineptitude

plagued *Secret Of Mana*.

Turn-based battles offer a cerebral approach, allowing scope for multitudinous, individual tactics and thought, while eliciting a great deal of attention and excitement when in dangerous situations. Yes, they do become repetitive at times, but not to the extent of the alternative, although the 'random encounter' device is admittedly obsolete and in need of a rethink. Games such as *Zelda* rely more heavily upon fleeting chance and rudimentary technique, appearing to omit any demanding skill.

Mr Poole at one point decried the system's relation to elements of chess; supposedly detracting from any desirable immersion. This was a recurring criticism of the other clichés in his article and it is a desirable aspect of gaming. However, I feel turn-based battling provides an immense advantage to the gameplay, while detracting only slightly from any immersion (at times enhancing it). Even so, dynamics of chess are surely hugely advantageous, providing the cerebral aspect I have praised so much?

Turn-based battles may require innovative improvement and are a viable target of criticism, however they provide such an important gaming dynamic, that it is fatuous to suggest they should be extinguished.

Oliver Tilley, via email

Edge should drop PC game reviewing altogether. PC games and console games are known to be two different types of gaming. It isn't explainable, but PC games are your equivalent of movies like '7 Sins', 'Star Wars' and 'Apollo 13', while console games are more like 'toys', Disney films, which are simply fun and appeal to all ages.

The problem is that when **Edge** reviews a PC game it finds faults in it for basically not being a console game. PC games are not played like toys, they do not have a world where you can 'play' in, they are more like simulations.

It is hard to explain, but there is a distinct preference in **Edge** for games that are simply played like toys. For example, while I understand the *Max Payne* review, the fact is that it seems **Edge** was not happy that *Max Payne* did not have any console game elements. You just can't give a PC game to a console gamer (which is probably all of **Edge**'s writers).

Perhaps you should consider hiring a staff writer from a PC gaming background, as your PC game reviews hold absolutely no credibility within the PC gaming community.

Anon, via email

The **Edge** team boasts several experienced PC gamers, and their comments are based on a knowledge of gaming across all formats. Their verdict on *Max Payne* was unanimous; perhaps, in this instance, PC gamers should try their hand at consoles to see what they're missing out on.

I am writing to complain about the lack of skill-based gameplay in many of today's games. Most games these days seem to reward perseverance rather than skill.

The best example of this is the *Tomb Raider* games. Lara locks on to enemies, so there is no skill in combat whatsoever: just remember when the enemies appear and hold down fire while backing away.

Also, games like *Final Fantasy* involve almost no gameplay whatsoever. Keep playing for long enough, and you will finish them. Racing games also suffer: just learn braking points and entry and exit speeds and you are okay. Even the mighty *Gran Turismo 3* suffers from this.

Some fighting games still reward skill and reactions but that is about it. I yearn for the unlearnable *Dropzone*, where reactions are everything. Why can't developers give us some good old skool shoot 'em ups, with skill earning bonus points. These games should have loads of levels and well-balanced difficulty.

I still want to play *Armalyte* and *Salamander*. Admittedly, learning the attack waves does help in these games, but skill always gets you out of trouble. Oh, just a thought, but why doesn't someone do a version of *Qix* or *Zolyx* for the next gen of mobile phones. It would be bigger than *Snake*.

Ben Matthews, via email

Qix on a mobile? So, instead of despicable ring tones and inane banter, we'd have to suffer expletives and phones being thrown across train carriages instead?

Two letters in E100 touched on a topic still not properly debated but significantly relevant to the games industry – that of censorship, but moreover how it might relate to the potential politicisation of the field as it stands.

There is a common complaint from people working within the industry that we're not taken seriously enough by the mainstream media or academia (albeit that this is changing slowly), yet an outsider need only look at the vast majority of current output to regard gamers as uniformly white, heterosexual, male right wingers.

Take the case in point of *Soldier Of Fortune*, a game released in collaboration with the US magazine of the same name, which routinely

> "Perhaps you should consider hiring a staff writer from a PC gaming background, as you PC game reviews hold absolutely no credibility within the PC gaming community"



Mark Whitfield raises the issue of the moral responsibility of game developers and, indeed, reviewers; *Soldier Of Fortune* as a case in point

demands the right to bear firearms on a retributive criminal justice slate, and that's in real day-to-day life. Yet not one journal, including even serious titles such as **Edge**, appeared to have a problem with this at all. If you can imagine a film of the same name with the same premise being released, it would quite rightly be regarded with concern – not by the moral-righteousness lobby but by the more liberal and academic press, regardless of how well it was shot or produced. After all, if the BNP suddenly decided to commission a game involving compulsory repatriation of black people and it played really well, would we endorse it on the basis that it's simply gameplay that matters?

If we really do want to focus on a more grown-up content based level of gaming that moves outside the standard arenas of shoot 'em ups and fighting, we surely have to begin to start focussing on the ethics that eventually embody a title's storyline and ethos. That's not to say that we ban titles we don't like, but the execution shouldn't be the be all and end all, and particularly as environments become more realistic and worlds more immersive, we should at the very least have the courage to highlight and then challenge a game's ethics where they cause people concern.

Mark Whitfield, via email

Edge did in fact draw attention to the morally dubious nature of *Soldier Of Fortune*, though possibly, in retrospect, not strongly enough. As the medium becomes increasingly sophisticated, we will have to be ever more vigilant for titles that carry worrying agendas hidden beneath glossy exteriors.

I feel that games and films have more in common than just the terrible tie-ins that come out. With the advent of the PS2 and the Xbox, games have become more complex, but I am not sure if this is really such a good thing.

Most next-gen games are a bit like 'Chariots Of Fire', wonderful to look at and a wonderful bit of filming. But as dull as dish water. The old 16bit games are more like 'Terminator 2' or 'The Mummy' – just braindead fodder, but more enjoyable for it. This is the reason that the GBA has done so well, and this will also be the reason that the GameCube will have the best games.

I intend to by the Xbox, but I have a Game Boy Advance for when I just want to play games that are fun. After all that's what computer games are meant to be – fun.

I just wish developers would look at this instead of polygon count and 'realism'. Give the people entertainment and fun, not just clever programming.

Dave Ponsford, via email

The appearance of *Luigi's Mansion* and *Super Monkey Ball* this issue – two immensely good looking, but ostensibly fun games – should help restore your faith in next-gen software.

Now that you've reached issue 100, I thought I'd write a small note to say thanks for a superb magazine. I'd imagine that I'm a fairly typical **Edge** reader; 30-year-old male, married with small children whose been playing games since the '80s.

However, for me, it's always been a fairly lonely pastime. Sure I have the mate who likes a bit of *GT* and the one whose played *Quake* occasionally. But I don't know anyone else who has quite the same passion. Or three consoles under their telly.

And so it's nice, for one day a month anyway, to feel like I'm not the only sad bastard out there.

David Cooke, via email

Likewise.

From the forum

A selection of choice cuts from Edge-Online's discussion outlet

Poster: **jpickford**
Topic: **Mine's on the VAN!**
Good old Fed-Ex tracking. Should be here any time – it's like Christmas. I haven't been this excited about a new consoles since err... the last one (GBA). Will post verdict – assuming it arrives in working order.

From: **AlexWard**
Title: **Mine's on the VAN!**
My machine just arrived, and yet it has to sit under my desk until the end of next week. Tough, but games to finish...

From: **jpickford**
Title: **Mine's on the VAN!**
It was like Christmas this morning (I'm 34 btw). *Monkey Ball* gets better and better. It's a *CRASH* SMASH and a ZZAP! SIZZLER all in one. **Edge** will give it a snooty seven I'm sure.

From: **AlexWard**
Title: **Super Monkey Ball**
Wonderful!

From: **AlexWard**
Title: **Super Monkey Ball**
I played four levels and then hurriedly turned it off... game to finish. Must not risk shooting up more of this pure videogaming smack.

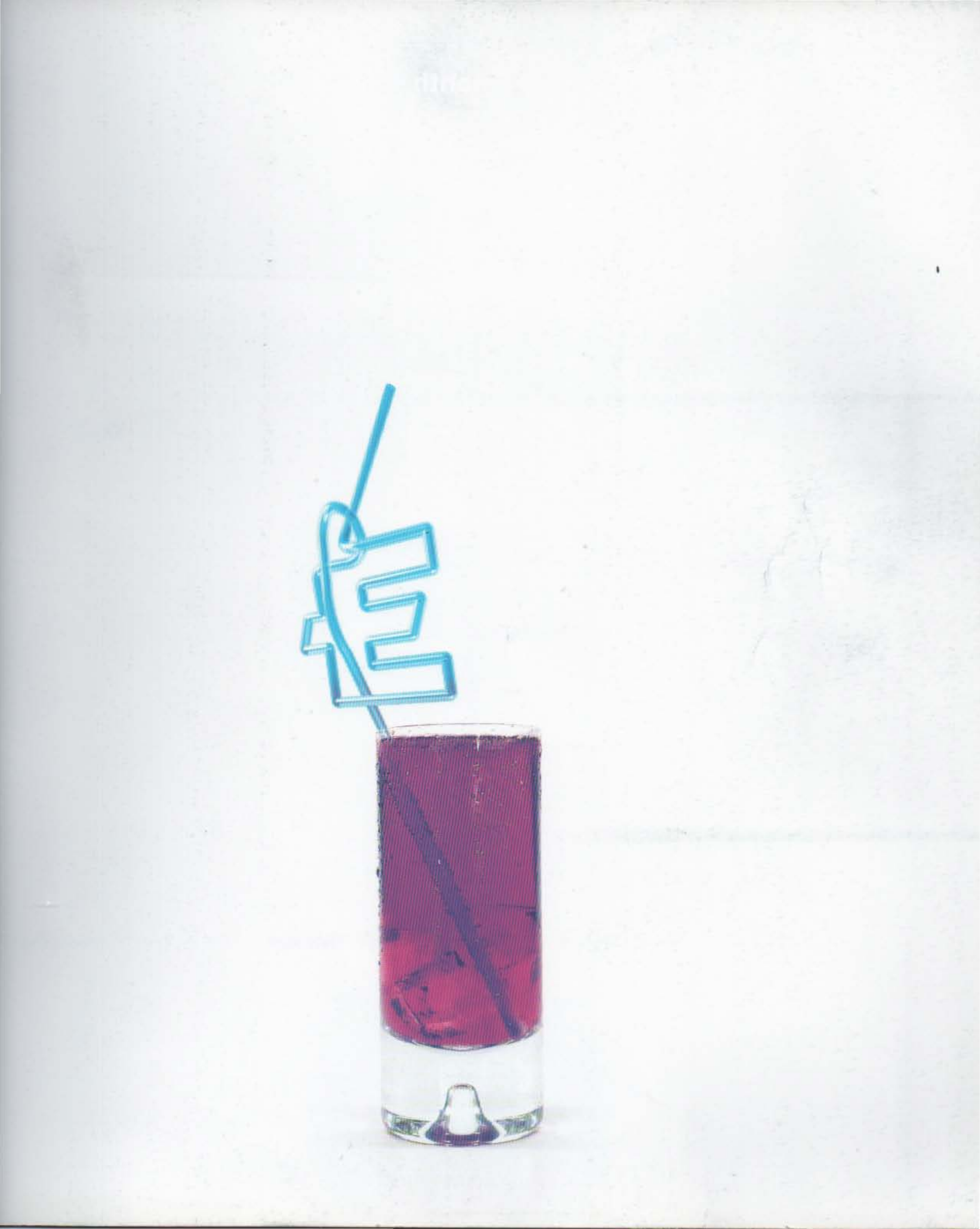
> "If the BNP suddenly commissioned a game involving compulsory repatriation and it played well, would we endorse it on the basis of its gameplay?"

Next month



Edge examines the handheld market:
what next for GBA; where next for portable gaming





Headhunter (DC)



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Dead Or Alive 3 (Xbox)



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Medal of Honor: Allied Assault (Xbox)



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Devil May Cry (PS2)



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Star Wars Rogue Leader (GC)



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